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Adventure

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AMERICA'S MOST EXCITING FICTION FOR MEN!

BAIT FOR THE MAN-TRAP

by JOSEPH CHADWICK

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Just Plug in

D-FROST-O MATIC

Women won't let you take it out!

REVOLUTIONARY NEW DEVICE PAYS YOU $5.00 AND MORE EACH AS HOUSEWIVES END HAND DEFROSTING FOREVER!

Patented Features Make Selling Easy!

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29,000,000 prospects eager to buy! Great AUTOMATIC unit converts ANY electric refrigerator to the new-self-defrosting type!

End This Forever!

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Rush coupon today for FREE information about amazing Sure Selling Plan. Easy as making a phone call—clicks with 87 out of 100 prospects in homes, apartments, hospitals. WE SHOW YOU HOW TO MAKE THE BIGGEST MONEY OF YOUR LIFE.

EXCLUSIVE ADVANTAGES

- Defrosts automatically EVERY NIGHT.
- All-Aluminum case—a precision instrument.
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- Underwriters' Laboratories approved.
- Special single cord—no tangling wires.
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- Fully adjustable—one to six hour defrost time.
- Beautifully finished.
- Exclusive Skip-Defrost.
- Nationally Advertised.

GUARANTEED 2 WAYS

Guaranteed to customer for at least two years.

Guaranteed to YOU—Must sell or YOUR MONEY BACK!

Our Guarantee backed by the largest, finest manufacturer of its type in the world.

D-FROST-O MATIC

JOIN THESE MEN FOR EXCEPTIONAL PROFITS WEEKLY!

Received demonstrator today and sold five units first day out.
James W. Little

Rush me 20 more D-Frost-O-Matics. Customers are calling at my home for them. Mrs. D. A. Kearney

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John C. West

Sold first 6 D-Frost-O-Matics in 2 hours. Had no previous experience. It's wonderful. Leon B. Davis

I sold 19 out of first 20 calls. D-Frost-O-Matic is finest appliance I ever handled. George L. Dunivant

Act now—territories going fast

D-Frost-O-Matic Corp.
6 N. Michigan Ave., Dept. PF-8
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RUSH COUPON NOW!

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Rush me full information on making biggest money of my life with D-Frost-O-Matic, using your amazing Automatic Selling Plan.

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Easy to Sell...

AIR-CUSHIONED FROM HEEL TO TOE...

MAKE MONEY FROM THE FIRST HOUR!

FREE SELLING OUTFIT

SLIP ON... SLIP OFF!

Guaranteed by Good Housekeeping — REPLACEMENT OR REFUND OF MONEY IF NOT AS ADVERTISED THEREIN

Call on folks all around you—show and sell amazing NEW KIND OF SHOE! Hidden elastic in front makes it easy to SLIP-OFF . . . no more broken laces or wrinkled tongues! And Built-in EXCLUSIVE Velvet-eez Air Cushioned Insole from heel to toe gives buoyant arch support on resilient, soothing-soft foam rubber!

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NATIONALLY ADVERTISED

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GOOD HOUSEKEEPING GUARANTY SEAL HELPS OPEN DOORS . . . CLINCH SALES!

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MASON SHOE MFG. CO., Dept. M-680
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Name .....

Address .....

City and State .....

SEPTEMBER ISSUE OUT AUGUST 9th

Adventure

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AUGUST, 1950

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Would appreciate hearing from any of the U. S. Marines who were members of the First Marine Aviation Force, Northern Bombing Group or the members of the First Marine Aeronautic Company during World War I. The Northern Bombing Group served in France and the First Marine Aeronautic Company did submarine patrol in the Azores Islands. W. P. T. Hill, Major General, U. S. Marine Corps, c/o Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington 25, D. C.

I would like to locate Samuel Work, the oldest brother of Frank and Albert Work, formerly of Chicago. He could be in the auto or clothing business. Chances are he might be somewhere around Los Angeles, California, or a town nearby. Please write Monroe Work, 750 South State Street, Elgin, Illinois.

I would like to contact Jerry Gilmore, whom I lost track of about two years ago. He and I both worked at Stockton, California. He lived on the West Coast around Point Arena. Write Earle Donald Fowler, 421 B Street, Hayward, California.

I would appreciate hearing from anyone knowing the whereabouts of T/5 Reinder Kars. Last address, Service Co. 309th Infantry Regt., serial no. 36450114. Previously attached to tank destroyer outfit Camp Hood, Texas. Write Edward Morris, 119 N. Kenilworth Avenue, Oak Park, Illinois.

I am anxious to hear from Pete Burkoski. He was at one time (about 1939) a trainer and handler of elephants for Barnum and Bailey's Circus. About 40 years old, 5′ 6″ tall, husky build. Last heard from in 1941, when he was a patient in a Staten Island Hospital (New York). Write Charles J. Koerner, 10 Castle Creek Road, Binghamton, RD 4, N. Y.

(Continued on page 8)

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No needless, old-fashioned "scales" and exercises. No confused, perplexing study. You learn to play by playing. It's thrilling, exciting, inspiring! No wonder hundreds of thousands of people have taken up music this easy way. No wonder enthusiastic letters like those reproduced here pour in from all over the world.

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(Continued from page 6)

Will any former member of the Adventure Pen Club please write Frank G. Babylon, 2055 Dartmore St., Pittsburgh 10, Penna.

I am trying to find my father, Noble H. McGinnis. When last heard of he was operating a funeral home somewhere in Okla. Pvt. Wm. H. McGinnis, RA 26964691, 111th Engr. Supply Co. Apo 942 c/o PM, Seattle, Washington.

Will anyone knowing George W. Spiegelberg, please ask him to get in touch with me? I think his home is in New York City. Carlos M. Diaz, M. Calle 29th, No. 1809, Chihuahua, Chih, Mexico.

Veterans who served at Dutch Harbor are planning a reunion in Chicago in 1950. We are eager to hear from Naval and Marine personnel who served at N.O.B., N.A.S., and N.A.F. from 1941 to the fall of 1945. Write J. Matthews, 5321 North Ashland, Chicago 40, Ill.

Would appreciate hearing from anyone knowing the whereabouts of Walter Coppinger, stationed in Panama around the time of the first World War He was discharged from the Army at Fort Benning, Georgia. Please notify James Corrigan, 1225 Bloomfield Street, Hoboken, N. J.

Sister and nephew of Melvin P. Verschneider would like to hear from anyone knowing his present address. He has not been heard from in five years. He is 53 years old, an expert auto mechanic and his last known address was 21 Evergreen St., Cortland, N. Y. Send information to nephew, Harry Farrar, c/o D. Pitale, 32 So. Conn. Ave., Atlantic City, N. J.

Would like information of Army buddies' whereabouts: John Kowal, Hamtramck, Mich.; Harry Gottfriedd, Chicago; John Tyson, N. Y. C. All of the 31st MRC (ETO) last seen in Chantilly. Also Emil de Roseby, 29th Inf. Div., last seen near Frankfurt A/M. Write John F. Laughlin, 4719 N. Cicero Ave., Chicago 30, Ill.

I am trying to locate a friend and Army buddy, Hovey Murphy. Anyone knowing his address would do a great favor by writing Tony T. Perkins, Route No. 8, Box 626, Salem, Oregon.

Would appreciate hearing from or about:—Leo Corns, last heard from in Indianapolis, Ind. 1944, believed in Chicago.—Lt. Wm. Gable, USAAF, 1944, home was in Jay County, Ind.—Pvt. Jas. Martin, last heard from at Wakeman Gen. Hosp., Camp Atterbury, Ind. 1945, home in vicinity of Cincinnati, O., decorator by trade.—George J. Snyder, last address 1122 E. Main Street, Clarksburg, W. Va. 1942—Roscoe Shirley, discharged from Army at Camp Atterbury, Ind. 1944, home vicinity of Grafton, W. Va. Write to George E. Ziegler, R.R. No. 2—Box No. 178 Spencer, Indiana.

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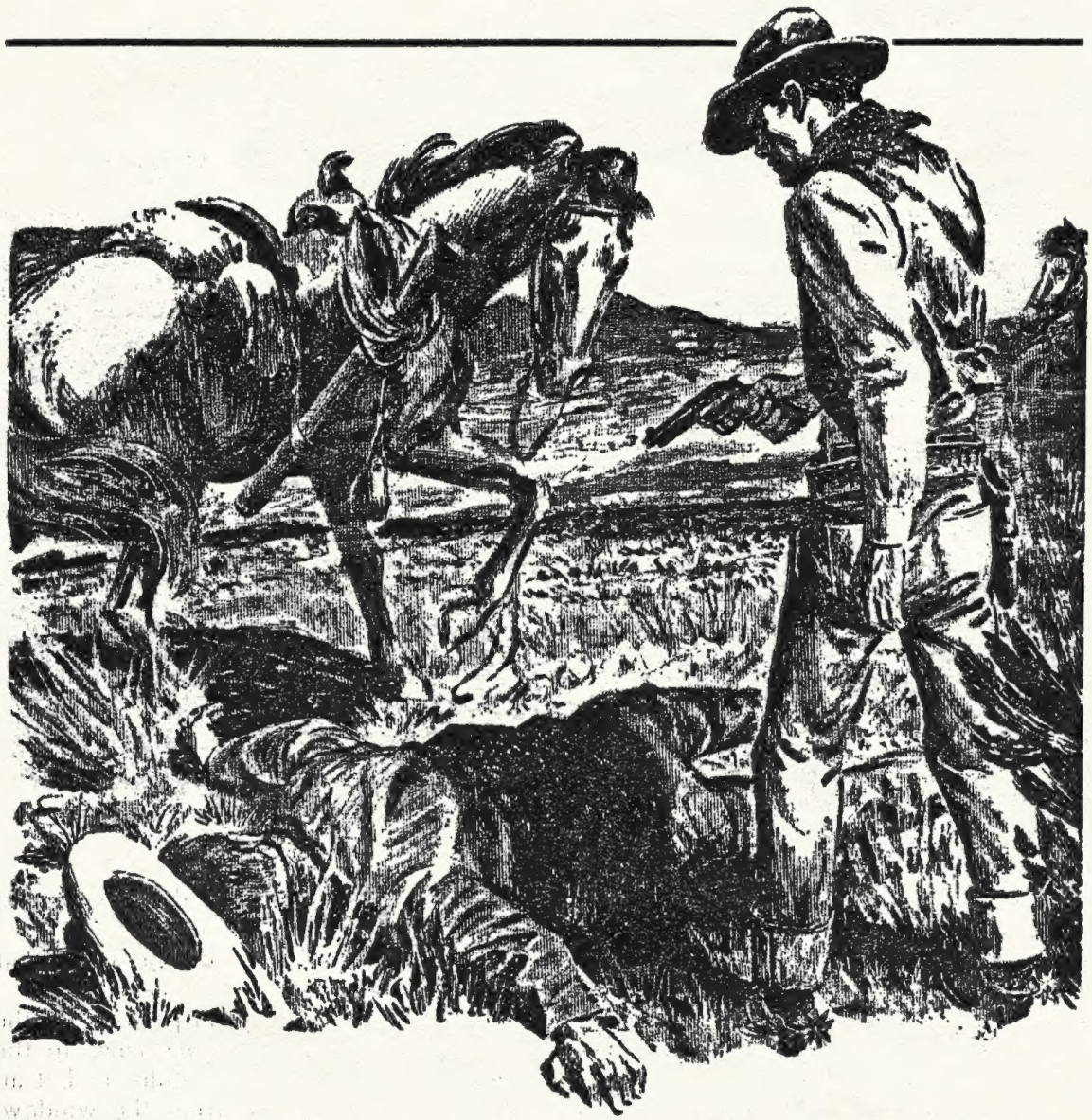


"Play 'possum, friend," Bart whispered. Then he lifted his six-gun and fired three shots as fast as he could work hammer and trigger.

IT WAS an old Mexican *rancho,* and from where Rocklin reined in atop the ridge it looked deserted. Rocklin dropped his pack-horse's lead rope, hooked a lanky leg about the horn of his roan's Navasota saddle, took out makings. His cigarette lighted, he dug a pair of field glasses from his saddlebag and gave the place a careful scrutiny. He was in no hurry to ride into what might well be a trap.

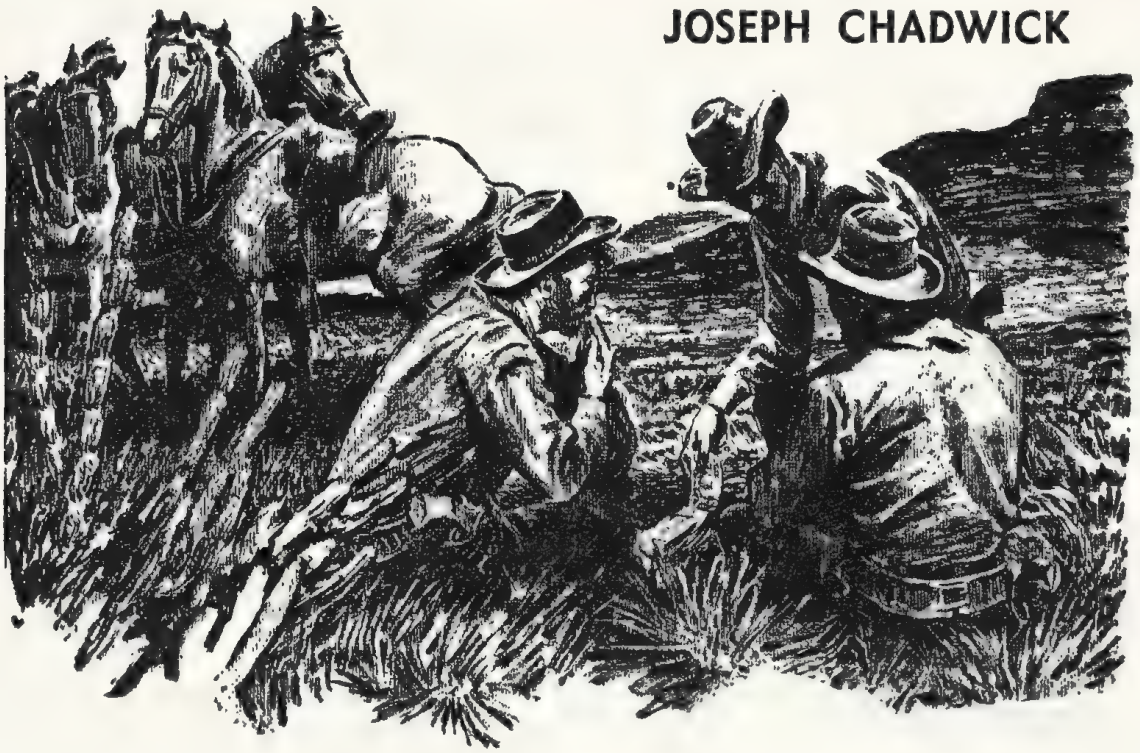
The house was a mere hut with crumbling adobe walls and a sagging *viga* roof, and the barn wasn't much bigger. The rickety pole corral was empty, and a sweep of the glasses across the hardscrabble range showed Rocklin no cattle.

The trail he followed was littered with human bones bleaching under the desert sun, and Rocklin didn't fancy leaving his own in such a lonely place—unburied and unmourned.

He was plagued of late by the feeling that he had stayed too long on this job,

THE MAN-TRAP

By
JOSEPH CHADWICK



that he was stretching his luck too thin. The paper in his pocket, the commission signed by President Teddy Roosevelt, was scant protection against a bushwhack bullet. Or a knife. Or, as his friends in the Customs Service back in Nogales had warned him, against poison.

He heaved a sigh finally, tossed the cigarette butt aside, settled himself in the saddle. Towing his sorrel pack mare, he rode down from the rocky ridge and headed toward the ancient adobe buildings. The door of the hut was closed, but a glassless window seemed to stare at him like an unblinking eye. He circled, came up behind the barn.

He left his horses there, went on afoot, moving warily about the hut. It was blind on three sides, and, reaching the front, he halted at the edge of the window. He risked a quick look, then a longer one. He could see little in the dim interior—a blackened fireplace, a stripped bunk, a bench, a wooden pail, and the end of a plank table.

It was the position of the table that puzzled him.

It was not in its logical position, in the center of the room. It was close to the door, which was why he could see but an end of it. He turned from the window, gazed frowningly at the door. A crude plank affair hanging no doubt on leather hinges.

It stood open a scant inch.

Rocklin was now convinced that no one was here, but it could still be a trap. He looked about, saw a little stack of brush kindling. He picked up a gnarled mesquite stick and, standing to one side of the door, used the stick to shove it open.

The blast came when the door was halfway open.

It thundered in Rocklin's ears. It tore the mesquite stick from his hand. It left him shaking violently.

HE GOT his nerve back, and entered the hut. It was hazy with powdersmoke. The shotgun was rigged on the table, braced with chocks of wood and fastened down with rope. A stout string tied to the trigger ran up to the ceiling, across it, down the wall, and over to the top of the door. The string ran over bent nails along the ceiling and down the wall. It had served as a lanyard to fire the shotgun.

"Neat," Rocklin muttered. "A hell of a way for me to earn seven dollars a day."

There was a knotted feeling in his guts, right where the shotgun charge would have caught him had he entered the 'dobe without taking care. The gun had but a single barrel, and so was no longer dangerous. Rocklin stared at it, but it told him nothing. He circled the table, gazed around the hut. Some old cooking utensils lay before the fireplace, but there was no stock of grub to show that anyone would be coming back to the place. The *ranchero* was long gone, and gone for good.

There were half a dozen cigarette butts and an empty whiskey bottle on the earthen floor, left there certainly by the man—or men—who had set up the shotgun. He pushed his hat back and wiped clammy sweat from his brow, and there was a worried frown on his rather gaunt face. No doubt about it, Mounted Chinese Inspector Ed Rocklin was a marked man.

He was rolling a smoke when he heard the drumming of hoofs. A rider was approaching at a lope. Rocklin waited where he was, dropping his unlighted cigarette, drawing his gun. The rider came straight to the *rancho* buildings, and called out, "Hello, the house!"

Rocklin grunted with surprise.

It was a woman.

Rocklin caught a glimpse of her through the window, a blonde girl on a paint pony. He had a better view when he reached the door. She was dismounting. She wore men's duds—hat, shirt, levis, boots—but they didn't do her any harm. She had a full-blown figure that strained the seams of her levis and left no slack in her gray shirt. Her hat hung at her shoulders, and her hair, somewhat tousled, was the color of wild honey. Rocklin saw a flash of alarm in her eyes when she saw him.

He holstered his gun, walked toward her.

She eyed him warily, breathing hard, her lips parted. He watched the hurried rise and fall of her breast. Her alarm went, and she reached up and pushed her hair back off her forehead. Her manner said that she knew all about men, and that she could take care of herself.

"Looking for somebody?" he asked.

"Yes, of course."

"Who?"

"Old Esteban. The man who owns this place. Esteban de Baca."

Rocklin considered that. "The man who owns this place hasn't been around for a long time. Sure you're not looking for Charlie Hutch?"

She started. "Hutch?" she said. "Why should I be looking for a man like Charlie Hutch?"

"You tell me."

"Listen, mister; I don't need to tell you anything," she said. "You or any other man. I'm free, white, and over twenty-one. I do as I please—anytime, anywhere. Right now I'm wondering what you're doing here. And I'm going to find out. If you've harmed old Esteban . . ."

She left the threat unspoken, but it was unmistakable.

She strode defiantly past Rocklin to the hut, then came to an abrupt halt in the doorway. Rocklin heard her gasp. She whirled, frightened.

"What's that?"

"Maybe you can guess."

"But. . . ?"

Rocklin nodded. "If you'd come here a little earlier and pushed that door open, you'd have got it," he said. He didn't like the thought; a body like that torn apart by a shotgun blast. He shuddered. "It was meant for me. I was to find Charlie Hutch here. I found that, instead. No old man with a Mexican name." He eyed her narrowly. "Maybe Charlie or somebody else sent you to see if that trap worked," he said. "Maybe you were posted up in the hills, to wait for the gun to go off. You could have seen me ride in, heard the shot, and then—"

She gave him a wild look, ducked past him, ran to her horse.

Rocklin swung about and was just in time to keep her from mounting. She had

one foot in the stirrup when he caught her. He said, "Hold on a minute. We're talking some more." She tried to pull away, then turned on him with sudden fury. It was like trying to hold a cougar, Rocklin found. She used her fists, man-fashion, pounding his chest. He lost his hold on her, then she clawed him along the cheek.

He threw his head back to escape her nails, and got his arm about her waist. She put her hands to his chest, shoved suddenly, and hooked a foot around one of his ankles. He was expertly tripped, and, losing his balance, he fell backwards. He dragged her down with him, but she rolled clear and jumped to her feet. Rocklin heaved over onto his stomach, grabbed her right boot as she started to run. She went down hard, crying out. But there was still fight in her. And panic. Rocklin said, "Take it easy, sweetheart." Then, seeing her grab up a fist-sized rock, he dived at her.

He landed on her, but she struck out, with deadly aim, at the proper moment. The rock caught Rocklin above the left eye. Pain exploded in his brain, and blinded him. He heard a groan from his own throat. He felt himself grow limp, and the girl squirm away from him. She jumped up, stood over him.

"Lay hands on me again," she said fiercely, "and I'll kill you!"

Rocklin's vision began to clear. He saw her blurredly, backing away from him. She dropped the rock upon reaching her paint horse, then caught up the reins and swung to the saddle. Rocklin got to his hands and knees.

"Listen—"

"You listen, mister," she broke in. "Don't ever try that again with me. It'll get you shot down like a coyote."

She swung the paint about, headed south at a hard lope.

Rocklin lurched to his feet, stood swaying, staring after her. He reached up and felt blood over his left eye. He muttered, "Well, I'll be damned!" He said it with surprised admiration.

There was a well at the side of the ranchhouse, and Rocklin drew a pail of water. He doused his head, and the cool shock eased the pain over his eye. He squeezed the water from his hair, then hunkered down in the shade. He made a cigarette, smoked, thought, and worried.

He'd come this far north from his patrol along the border because of a tip that Charlie Hutch was holed up here at the de Baca *rancho*. He wanted Charlie Hutch badly, and he'd been hunting him for months. Hutch was a member of an alien smuggling ring, but also a man likely to crack if caught. Rocklin had hoped to force the hardcase into telling who bossed the ring. Only by learning the identity of the head man could he win this vicious game of hide-and-seek.

Since he was the only Mounted Chinese Inspector—a line rider for the Immigration Bureau, actually—Rocklin had run into trouble enough with individual smugglers before the more efficient ring was organized. Now he was not only being outsmarted by the unknown head of the organization, with his every move known before he made it, but was also being tricked into making wrong moves.

The tip about Charlie Hutch had been bait for the trap, of course.

Rocklin had been drawn far north of his patrol along the International Border, and that suggested that the man he sought —the shadowy figure bossing the actual alien runners like Charlie Hutch—operated from somewhere in this country. Not too far from the *rancho*. Rocklin thought, *The girl. To hell with Hutch—find the girl!* He was sure that she hadn't come to the *rancho* to see its erstwhile owner but to ascertain for the ring whether or not he had been caught in the shotgun trap. He was also sure that, since she knew Charlie Hutch, she knew the big man—the man the smugglers called *El Sombro,* The Shadow. With a face and figure like hers, she might even be *El Sombro's* woman.

To hell with Charlie Hutch.

Find the girl.

Rocklin flung away his cigarette, rose, retrieved his hat, went to his horses. It wasn't difficult for him to trail her.

CHAPTER II

BOOM TOWN

HER tracks led him south through a pass in the low rock hills, then west along the road to Altura. It was sundown when Rocklin topped a rise and saw Al-

tura just beyond. He stared with astonishment. It was no longer the same place. On his last visit, nine months ago, it had been a drowsy Arizona cow town. The surrounding country had been cattle range. Now Altura had mushroomed into a full-fledged town with a railroad running into it from the north and the countryside covered with a forest of oil-well derricks. The cattle were gone, and the land was no longer yellow with grass but black with oil slick. It was an eyesore.

Rocklin recalled now that he'd heard about oil being found here, but he hadn't expected to find an oil field in full boom. He supposed that he would find the men he knew in Altura fat-rich.

It was no longer a short one-street community of adobe houses and buildings. It was mostly a plank town now, with new buildings still going up and still plenty of tents pitched in odd corners. Altura now had hotels, restaurants, stores, shops, saloons, gambling-houses, dance-halls. The place was filled with people, few of them in range clothes. A train of tank cars was pulling away from the depot. Freight wagons loaded with lumber and machinery rolled along the main street. There were other rigs: buckboards, buggies, carriages. Altura bustled. It was charged with excitement.

Rocklin put his horses up at the Star Livery Stable, and the proprietor, a fat man named Shane, let him stow his pack of supplies and campgear, in the harness room. Rocklin paused in the doorway to roll a cigarette, and saw the shiny carriage drawn by a pair of matched grays and driven by a colored man in livery coming from the center of town. It was a handsome outfit, but it was the passenger who really caught Rocklin's eye.

It was a woman, a beautiful and fashionably dressed woman.

And she was the girl he had encountered at the de Baca *rancho*.

Or her twin.

Not only Rocklin stared at her. Her passage along the crowded street turned plenty of heads. She was all in green. Her dress had puffed sleeves and a form-fitting bodice. There was a huge plume on her hat. She wore gloves as an added vanity. It was the same girl. Rocklin knew that when she happened to catch sight of him. Her eyes widened, her mouth thinned down. And she ordered her driver to whip up his team. The grays pranced, hit a smooth trot. The carriage rolled swiftly past the livery stable.

The fat liveryman nudged Rocklin with his elbow, chuckled, said, "You'd have to be an oil king to hold a lease on a piece of property like that, stranger."

"Who is she?"

"Nobody you could get to know, friend."

"Who is she?" Rocklin said again, demandingly.

"Her name's Belle Marvin," Shane said. "But that's not as important as what she is. Gossip has it that she's Matt Tabor's woman."

The carriage turned south along a road that led to the oil fields, disappearing from sight. She'd reached Altura a couple hours ahead of him, Rocklin realized, the way she had been riding when she left the *rancho*. Plenty of time for her to make this astonishing transformation.

Rocklin said, "So she's Tabor's woman," and didn't like the idea.

He knew Matt Tabor, a wildcatter. The man moved a drilling crew onto every new oil field. Among horny-fisted oil men he was known as Wild Matt, and he had a reputation for not only making fortunes but also for squandering them. He was tougher than any roughneck, and knew more about making hole than a dozen ordinary drillers. But how Wild Matt Tabor's woman fitted into the dirty game of alien smuggling Rocklin couldn't guess. Unless Tabor himself was involved in it.

Rocklin said, "How's Tabor's luck here at Altura?"

"What he doesn't own around here, he controls," Shane said. "He's formed an outfit called Globe Petroleum Company. He's in the saddle, and he's riding high, wide and handsome. They call him Lucky Matt Tabor, nowadays. That fancy rig is his, and he's built himself a big house west of town."

Rocklin nodded.

He couldn't figure it, Matt Tabor in the alien smuggling game.

He asked, "Is Fred Amberton still around?"

"Yeah," said Shane. "His law office is over Doan's Hardware Store."

Rocklin headed for the business center. He didn't see anybody he knew, and nobody seemed to pay any attention to him. He was well known down along the border, where he'd served as a Customs officer, a Wells Fargo messenger, and a deputy sheriff before becoming the Chinese Inspector. But the men who followed the oil booms were mostly a different sort from the men of the border country. And if there were alien smugglers mixed in with the oil field workers, they wouldn't step up to shake hands with Ed Rocklin.

He sighted the lawyer's shingle. It read, *Fred Amberton, Attorney-at-Law—Leases, Stocks.* An open flight of stairs at the side of the plank building took Rocklin up to the office door. He knocked, and Amberton's familiar lazy drawl said, "Come in."

He was comfortable in a chair, his feet on his desk, but came alive with a start at sight of Rocklin. He exclaimed, "Ed! Ed Rocklin—!" He dropped his feet, rose, came forward with outstretched hand. He was a man of Rocklin's age, a couple years past thirty, but he was already growing heavy and florid They'd known each other since they were kids, over in New Mexico. Rocklin had been a ranch kid, Amberton the son of a town merchant. At times they'd been bosom friends and again bitter enemies. Finally Amberton had been sent East to school.

SOME years later Rocklin had found him practicing law in Tucson, but Amberton was too easy-going to make a success of it. He'd used his office there for poker games, and there had always been a bottle hidden behind the copy of Blackstone on his shelf. Too many of his clients had been loose women. In the end Amberton had been forced to leave Tucson for a healthier climate. On his last visit to Altura, Rocklin had found the man at his lowest ebb—a drunken bum who had begged a loan.

But he looked prosperous now, and entirely sober. He pumped Rocklin's hand, slapped him on the back, said that his visitor was a sight for sore eyes. He was ignoring the fact that they had outgrown the day when it was possible for them to be either friends or enemies—that they were now just acquaintances and no more.

Then abruptly his florid, rather flabby face grew serious. "Funny, you're showing up here in Altura just now, Ed," he said.

"Why is it funny, Fred?"

"Because I was going to try to get in touch with you."

"What for?"

Amberton's eyes took on a veiled look. "The usual thing," he said carefully. "I've been retained to make you a proposition. My client approached me because he learned that you and I are friends. I'm acting for him only because we're friends. Otherwise I wouldn't touch such a case. Bribery is an ugly business. But letting a friend be murdered is even uglier. Ed, as your friend, I advise you to resign your commission. If you will take my advice, you can retire to a fine ranch in California —as its owner. If you won't take it . . ."

"I'll retire to a plot six feet by three—permanently," Rocklin finished for him. "Is that it, Fred?"

Amberton now owned a fine bookcase filled with new law tomes, but he still kept his bottle hidden behind the old copy of Blackstone's *Commentaries.* He got a pair of glasses from the bottom desk drawer. His hand shook badly as he filled the glasses. They drank in silence. It was Amberton who needed the drink.

Rocklin sank into a leather armchair, rolled a cigarette. "You scared for me or for yourself, Fred?" he asked.

"Lord, Ed; don't take it so damned casually!"

"Who's your client?"

"I can't tell you."

Rocklin lighted his cigarette. "I guess not," he said. "Because you're scared for yourself too. All right. You're safe. I could probably beat it out of you, but I won't. They'd cut out your tongue for talking, even under duress." He paused, watching the lawyer, seeing that Amberton really was scared. "It's a dirty business," he went on. "A week ago I picked up the trail of a bunch of Chinese that had just been run across the Border. I kept the trail hot. You know what happened, Fred?"

Amberton shook his head.

"When the two smugglers figured I was going to catch up with them," Rock-

lin said, "they murdered the Chinese—four of them. Ten days before that I found three Chinese dead on the desert, where they'd been abandoned. They'd died of thirst. I can tell you about other times—"

Amberton shuddered, said, "Don't," and hurriedly poured himself another drink.

Rocklin continued, "The Exclusion Laws say that Chinese aren't to be permitted to enter the country. I'm supposed to keep them from entering. So the smuggling ring tries to get rid of me—with bullets and with bribes. Once I was offered a vacation in Mexico. Plenty of tequila, plenty of señoritas. Now it's a fine ranch in California. Sure, I want to retire. But not to a ranch I have to sell my soul for. And I'm not going to retire until I nail the man who organized the smugglers into a big business."

"Ed, for your own sake—"

"Tell your client what I said, Fred."

Amberton looked a little sick. "You haven't a chance," he said thickly. "They must have known you were coming to Altura, else they wouldn't have contacted me. You'll never leave it alive."

Rocklin said, "You could be wrong. I've been hunting Charlie Hutch for a long time, figuring that I could make him squeal. A man called *El Sombro* heads the smuggling ring, and Hutch must know who *El Sombro* is. But I've got another lead now. So to hell with Hutch. I'm following my other lead."

Amberton was curious. "What is it, Ed?"

Rocklin grinned mirthlessly. "I'm not your client, *amigo*. The man I'm after—or somebody close to him—is your client. I wouldn't want to leave you with dangerous information. It's as easy to make a tongue wag as to cut it out. I know what I'm up against, Fred. It used to be that a smuggler got a hundred dollars for bringing a Chinese across the Border. Now the pay is two hundred fifty a head. It's a bonanza, when you figure how many Chinese are waiting down in Sonora. They come to Mexico by the boatload. Thousands of them, I reckon."

"Two hundred fifty a head," Amberton said, in an awed tone. "Who's paying that kind of money?"

"The Six Companies, up in Frisco," Rocklin told him. "It's a big outfit headed by rich Chinese. A sort of Oriental brotherhood. It takes care of every pigtailed son who finds his way into the western United States, even to the lowliest coolie. And the Six Companies gets its investment back—unless the coolie ends up murdered out on the desert. Fred, your client—white man or yellow—is repping for that outfit." He rose from the armchair, set his empty glass on the desk and dropped his cigarette into the spittoon. "No, Fred, I'm not telling you about my lead. You don't want to get mixed up any more than you already are in such a game."

He crossed to the door.

He said, "By the way, I hear that Matt Tabor is the kingpin here."

Amberton nodded. "That's right. I handle his legal affairs," he said. Then added, as an afterthought, "I wish I'd stuck to him and not handled this other thing. Ed, you don't think that I. . . ?"

"Sure not, *amigo,*" Rocklin said. He meant it. He didn't think that Fred Amberton had the guts to be involved in alien smuggling. "That woman of Tabor's," he added. "She's a looker."

"What woman?"

"Shane at the livery stable said her name was Belle Marvin."

"Oh, yes. I heard some talk."

"Who is she?" Rocklin asked. "Just one of the gay ladies who drift in where there's big money?"

Amberton was lighting a cigar, not paying much attention. He said vaguely, "There are plenty of that kind here, but I guess Tabor is too rich now to go for shoddy merchandise. This girl is off a ranch to the north of here. The M7 Ranch. A two-bit spread. She inherited it. Her father died some months ago." He managed a smile. "Got ideas about her, Ed—after one look? I wouldn't have, were I you. Matt Tabor is no man to cross."

Rocklin laughed. "I couldn't afford her," he said, and went out.

HE WAS hungry, and there was a hash-house directly across the street. A Mexican woman was serving the half dozen men at the counter, and it was not

until Rocklin was perched on a stool that he discovered that it was another Chinese restaurant. He could see back to the kitchen, and two Chinese were working there. Rocklin suddenly wasn't so hungry. He had heard that Orientals were handy with poisons, and friends had warned him against eating in Chinese-owned places.

One of the men came from the kitchen with an order, and Rocklin knew him. Willie Hu he was called. An oldish man. He'd been in the country from long before the Exclusion Laws, long enough to dress and talk American. But he still wore his queue. His black eyes were sharp. He sighted Rocklin at once. He smiled broadly, showing bad teeth. He had a little trouble with his r's, and sounded as though he lisped.

"Hello, Mister Rocklin," Willie said. "Welcome to Altura."

"Nice town, Willie?"

"Plenty money, Mister Rocklin."

"Yeah? What kind of meals you serving?"

"To you, the best," Willie Hu said. "First one on the house. A steak, maybe? My cook is good with steaks."

"Who is he, Willie?"

"A good boy. A nephew."

"He got a *chock gee?*"

Willie Hu grinned, bobbed his pigtailed head. "Plenty good *chock gee,* Mister Rocklin. You want to see it?"

Rocklin grinned and shook his head. "Don't bother," he said. "Just don't let him sprinkle any of that rat poison on the steak."

Willie grinned back. "No rat poison, Mister Rocklin. Willie Hu knows you a friend of Chinese even though you work at no-good job. You find a Chinese on desert, dying of thirst. You save his life. He is nephew too. Fine man, Mister Rocklin is. His job—no good."

Rocklin didn't have long to wait. Willie brought him a huge steak and fried potatoes. The waitress brought him coffee, and later a big wedge of dried-apple pie. Rocklin ignored the possibility of poison, and enjoyed the meal. He didn't ignore the possibility that Willie Hu might be *El Sombro's* contact with the Six Companies and also Fred Amberton's bribe-offering client. The Chinese was no stupid coolie.

He was probably a lot smarter than the white men who were his customers.

Willie came along the counter when Rocklin finished eating.

His manner was apologetic. "Some people don't savvy about a good man being in a bad job, Mister Rocklin," he said. "You got more enemies than friends. You a cowboy once, could be big rancher now. Willie got some money saved. You find a ranch you like—California, maybe—and I buy it. You be boss. Make lots of money on cattle. I don't forget that you saved nephew's life."

"You forget that your nephew was deported back to China."

"No matter, Mister Rocklin."

"He'll come back again, eh?"

"Could be," Willie Hu said. "Get him in safe, give him a *chock gee.* Nice. You find a good ranch, Mister Rocklin."

Rocklin said, "Sure," and left the restaurant.

He paused on the plank walk and mechanically rolled a smoke. He didn't feel happy, even with a good meal under his belt. Willie Hu was in on the smuggling, but nothing on earth would make him admit it. He'd made Rocklin realize the futility of his job by hinting that his nephew would make another attempt to enter the country. That was how it went. A Chinese either made it safely or tried a second time if caught and deported—if the smugglers didn't murder him. Once safe the alien was supplied with a *chock gee,* a certificate of residence that was supposed to prove a Chinese had been in the United States since before the Exclusion Laws were passed. The trouble was, a *chock gee* could be forged or, if genuine, transferred. One man hadn't a chance of beating such a set-up, and Rocklin felt suddenly soured. The quicker he called it quits, the better. But he wasn't giving up until he made one more try at finding *El Sombro* and smashing the ring. He had one promising lead to run down—the girl.

Rocklin was so lost in his gloomy thoughts that he didn't notice the carriage until it halted before him.

The girl wasn't alone now, and her companion called out sharply, "You, there! You, mister!"

It was Matt Tabor.

CHAPTER III

MORE BLUFF THAN GUTS

MATT TABOR was an important man, and important men couldn't remember all the little men they encountered. If the oil king knew Ed Rocklin, he was doing a good job of pretending that he took him for a stranger and a no-account drifter at that. Tabor was a husky man in his late forties, but he showed his years only in the graying of his temples and of his neatly trimed mustache. He was handsome in a coarse, ruddy fashion. He had the arrogant manner of a man accustomed to bossing other men, and he said harshly, "Get in."

Rocklin looked at the man, and he looked at the girl.

He lifted his hat to Belle Marvin, smiled at her chilling look, and said, "Mister Tabor, being an oil king seems to have its points. But the lady looks young enough to be your daughter."

"Dammit, man; do as I say! Get into this rig!"

"Didn't you ever hear that three makes a crowd, Mister Tabor?"

"Listen—"

"And the lady might not like crowds," Rocklin said.

Belle sniffed. She said scornfully, "Let's go on, Matt. After all, he's not worth bothering with. He's just a saddle bum."

Rocklin stepped over to the carriage. "Since the lady doesn't mind," he said, grinning at her, "I will come along."

He climbed into the rear of the carriage, though it was evident that Tabor had meant for him to ride with the colored driver. The girl made room for him, and Rocklin seated himself so close that his thigh pressed against hers. The driver started the team. They rolled smoothly through town, traveled a short distance along the west road, then up a curving lane to a huge stone house, still partly under construction, midway up a slope. The curtained windows glowed softly with lamplight.

They climbed from the rig, Rocklin offering the girl his hand. She shrank from him the moment her feet touched the ground. The wide front door was opened by a colored maid, and they filed into a hallway. The maid took Tabor's hat. Rocklin kept his. Tabor said, "In here," and led them into an enormous and luxuriously furnished living-room.

"So this is how an oil king lives," Rocklin said. "Cozy."

Tabor turned to him, smiling.

And hit him a terrific blow in the stomach.

Rocklin staggered, bent double, gasping for the breath that was knocked from him. Pain exploded in his head as Tabor hit him again, at the base of the skull. His knees buckled, but he was thrown to the carpet. Tabor booted him in the ribs. Rocklin thought he heard the girl cry out. There was a painful roaring in his head.

He sensed that Tabor had backed off, and he struggled to rise. He made it to his hands and knees. The room and all its fine furninshings seemed to be spinning. His stomach churned. Then his vision cleared and he saw the bulky Tabor standing there grinning at him just beyond his reach. The man now held a gun. Rocklin's gun. Beyond Tabor, the girl watched without expression. *Damn her,* Rocklin thought. He hated her and her fancy clothes. And then, crazily, he wondered what it would be like to hold her in his arms. Maybe Tabor would tell him. Damn Tabor too. He lurched to his feet, stood swaying.

"Always figured you cowhands were more bluff than guts," Tabor said. "That was just a lesson, mister. Now you know better than to lay your hands on a lady."

"She's a lady?"

"You want some more, mister?"

"You always bring a man into your home to give him a beating, Tabor?"

"I didn't want the lady's name dragged in the dirt," Tabor said, reasonably enough. "Now we'll get to the rest of it. What were you doing at the de Baca place? What's this about a shotgun and Charlie Hutch?"

Rocklin drooped, swayed, let himself look whipped. But he was getting his bearings again, and there was one thing that he knew about oil field men. They were brawlers, the dirtiest kind of brawlers, but they were no good with guns. Tabor didn't

hold that .45 Colt as though he was an expert with a revolver. Its muzzle was pointed down, and he didn't have it cocked. Rocklin had lost his hat when he fell, and it lay halfway between him and Tabor.

"I have some business with Hutch," he said. "I've been looking for him a long time. He was supposed to be at the *rancho*. Maybe you know about Hutch."

"How should I know about a bum like him?"

"The girl knows about him, doesn't she?"

He hadn't Matt Tabor's bulk, but there were one hundred eighty pounds of bone and muscle behind the blow.

"Talk sense," Tabor said. "Don't take me for a fool."

"Well, it's like this," Rocklin said, and stooped as though to pick up his hat.

He dived at Tabor's legs.

He hit them hard, and Tabor gave a yelp as he lost his balance and went over backwards. The gun flew from the man's hand, and Rocklin let it go. He came erect and struck out as Tabor tried to get up. He hadn't Matt Tabor's bulk, but there were one hundred eighty pounds of bone and muscle behind the blow. It caught Tabor squarely on the mouth. He flattened, and blood sprang from his smashed lips. He bellowed with rage, rolled over, came to his knees. Rocklin hit him again, and he fell against a table. It went over with a crash, spilling bric-a-brac. Tabor lay face down, and didn't move.

Rocklin said, "No guts, eh? All bluff, maybe?"

He went after his hat, then looked for his gun.

The girl had it, and she handled it more expertly than Tabor. Her ranch upbringing, no doubt. She held it level, steady, with both hands. She had it cocked.

Rocklin said, "I don't know. Maybe you'll get away with it, with your looks and with Tabor's money backing you. But it's always bad to kill a lawman. Maybe you wouldn't hang, sweetheart, but you won't be beautiful anymore when you get out of Federal prison."

"Wh-what?"

"You heard me, honey."

She was rattled. The gun wavered. She eased the hammer down. Rocklin walked over to her. She got scared and was about to thumb back the hammer again. He slapped her across the face, and her head rocked. He took the gun from her, holstered it.

"I wouldn't like you to spend the best years of your life behind bars, sweetheart," he told her. "Tough Matt will be coming to in a minute, so there's no time for us to become friendly. I'll see you some other time."

He left her holding a hand to her cheek, a dazed look in her eyes.

THE carriage, its driver dozing, waited out front. Rocklin walked down the curved lane, then halted beside the road to town. He took out makings, settled himself to wait in the dark. He thought of Belle Marvin up there in Tabor's house, maybe in Tabor's arms, and it got under his skin. A girl like that, as young as that. Damn! Then the carriage was coming before he was done with his cigarette. He felt better.

He jumped into the carriage when it turned onto the road. She didn't look scared, or even surprised. She said, "I knew you'd be waiting."

"Is that why you left so early?"

"I left because I'm not in the habit of visiting up there."

Rocklin didn't believe that, but at the moment it didn't matter. He glanced at the driver's back. The colored man was drooping, half asleep. Rocklin put his arms about her, drew her close, rough about it. She struggled, but she didn't fight him as she had at the *rancho*. She went limp when he kissed her, then strained against him.

He said, "I just wanted to know what it was like."

She asked, "What is it like?"

"It's hard to say."

Her breathing was fluttery. "Who—who are you, anyway?" she demanded. Her voice was as shaky as Rocklin felt.

She remained there in Rocklin's arms, limp and soft and sweet-smelling. He had a queer drugged feeling. A snaky suspicion glided through his mind. *El Sombro* and his smuggling ring had been trying to get him in every other way, and now they might be trying to bait him with a woman. If that was true, he was nibbling at the bait—and he didn't care if a trap was to be sprung on him. His surging emotions dulled his caution.

He said, "You know who I am, baby."

"No," Belle whispered. "And right now, I don't much care."

It was all too short a distance to town. They were already there, the carriage rolling toward the business center. The driver swung over before the hotel, the Globe House, and reined in his team. Belle had drawn away, and now said, "This is where I'm staying."

Rocklin got out, helped her down.

She said, "Thanks, George. Goodnight," to the colored man, and he pulled away. She smiled at Rocklin. "I'll see you tomorrow. We'll be in better shape to talk in the daylight." She turned toward the entrance.

Fred Amberton came bustling out just before she reached the door. He said, "Ed! Ed, I've been looking everywhere for you." His florid face looked excited. "Ed, Charlie Hutch is in town!"

Belle looked around at them, then disappeared inside.

Rocklin said absently, "Hutch?" Then he stared at the lawyer. "Fred, I thought you wanted to stay clear of this business."

Amberton gave him a sheepish grin. "A man can't stay clear of something his friend is involved with," he said. "And you and I have been friends a long time. Besides, that client of mine never mentioned Charlie Hutch to me. So I don't know anything about Hutch, except that

you're looking for him. I was in the Tucson Saloon when Hutch came in, Ed. He had a drink, then left. I watched him. He went to the Star Livery Stable."

"For a horse?" Rocklin said. "Maybe he rode out somewhere."

"He was in the office with Tim Shane."

"Well, I'll have a look."

"Watch your step, Ed," Amberton said worriedly. "I'll go with you."

Rocklin gave him a surprised look, but said nothing. They started along the street together. Altura was busier at night than by day. The saloons, gambling dives and dancehalls were crowded. They passed Willie Hu's restaurant. The old Chinese was counting the money in his till. They passed the town marshal's office, and Amberton suggested "Let's take Jim Norman along. He's a good man."

"Three men to take Charlie Hutch?" Rocklin said. "A kid could do it."

Amberton's step was lagging by the time they reached the livery stable. At the doorway, Rocklin said, "Better wait here, Fred." But Amberton tagged along.

There was a cubbyhole office to the left of the wide entrance. Its door stood open and a lamp burned inside, but Shane wasn't there. Rocklin peered back into the gloomy interior of the stable and saw somebody along the runway to the stalls. Somebody else came from the dark harness room. A third somebody came from a dark corner. Amberton yelled a warning, then uttered a strangling sound. Rocklin whirled, saw the lawyer go down. A shadowy figure jumped over the fallen man, swinging his gun up to club down Rocklin too. Rocklin went for his gun, but he was struck a savage blow along the left jaw with the barrel of the other man's gun. It staggered him. They jumped him from all sides then, and a voice said, "No shooting—no shooting!" There were five of them, too many for Rocklin. He fought briefly, but the gun-barrel hit him again and again. He slumped to the ground.

ROCKLIN never completely lost consciousness. He was stunned to the point of numbness, however, and they handled him like a corpse. They lifted him

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onto a saddled horse, his own roan gelding, belly down on it, then tied him securely with rope—as they would have tied a dead man. Three of them mounted their own horses, one catching up the roan's reins.

Somebody said, "What about Amberton, Bart?"

Bart replied, "Forget him. He'll be too scared to talk."

Rocklin heard the words, but his mind was too dazed to ponder them.

The horses got into motion, and the three riders took Rocklin from the stable by a back door. They avoided the street, headed away from the town. In the darkness no one saw them. At least no one questioned them. They walked their horses, but even so the position in which Rocklin was traveling would have caused him torment had he not been numbed from the gun-whipping.

It didn't last however. Gradually he lost that stunned feeling. His head throbbed with pain; it felt swollen to twice its size due to the rush of blood to it. After a long time he heard them talking again.

"How far are we taking him?"

"Far enough that he won't be found."

"A long ride for nothing."

"Nothing? I'm counting on *mucho dinero* for this job."

"Me, too. How about you, Bart?"

Bart's voice spoke with a Deep South, you-all accent. "All I know is what Mistah Hutch done told me. Mistah Hutch said the boss man would pay us. Not that I trust Mistah Hutch, though. Met up with his kind before. I remember once over in Cuba during the war . . ."

"What war, Bart? You mean when we were fighting the Spaniards?"

"Yes, suh. I sure do. I was with Teddy Roosevelt at San Juan Hill."

"No fooling?"

"Ain't one to lie, friend," Bart said.

Rocklin stopped listening. He wasn't interested in Bart's wartime experiences. He'd had some of his own; stinking jungles and bushwhacking Spaniards armed with .22 caliber but nonetheless deadly rifles. He was feeling worse by the minute, and he guessed that if he traveled far enough in this position he would welcome a quick death by a bullet. Bart kept talking, and the horses kept moving. The country grew rougher. They entered some rock hills, passed through them, descended into a sandy desert basin. It was a long, hard night . . .

They rode in silence again, except for an occasional sullen comment from two of the trio and a more cheerful observation from Bart. Finally one said, "Dawn in an hour. Far enough. Let's dump him."

They reined in, and Rocklin, in a sort of stupor, felt the bonds cut. Rough hands jerked at him, and he spilled to the ground.

"Who's doing the job?" one of the sullen voices asked.

"You-all can do the honors, Jake."

"Why me? What about Tex? What about you, Bart?"

"Not me," Tex growled. "I ain't killing him in cold blood."

Bart said, "Man who does the job will maybe get the most *dinero*. What do you say, Jake?"

"All right. If you hombres are too yellow," Jake said. "Wonder if he's got any money on him. I'll take a look."

He got down. He bent over Rocklin, went through his pockets, and said, "Some money. And a paper. Strike a match."

A match flared. "Twelve dollars," Jake said, disappointed. "Take a look at this paper. Signed by the President, himself!"

Rocklin tried to rise, prodded by some hazy notion of putting up a fight. He couldn't make it. The effort increased the pain in his head until his skull seemed about to split open. And his arms were useless from being so tightly bound for so long. Rocklin gritted his teeth to stifle a groan of despair.

Another match flared. Bart had the paper now. He had surprisingly agreeable face, for a hired killer. Astonishment spread over it as he examined the presidential document, and he muttered, "What do you know? Now don't that beat all!" The match went out.

His companions were dividing Rocklin's money.

Bart said, "Boys, I reckon we all know now why Mistah Hutch wanted him dead. Since he's such an important gent, I'll do for him my own self. But first I'll put this paper back in his pocket."

He dismounted, came to where Rocklin lay.

He knelt, thrust the paper into Rocklin's pocket, and drew his gun.

CHAPTER IV

BAIT FOR THE BUZZARDS

ROCKLIN stared helplessly up at the hardcase. Bart looked back over his shoulder, saw that his companions were still occupied with the money, then he whispered, "Friend, play 'possum." He rose, stepped back, lifted his six-gun, fired three shots as fast as he could work hammer and trigger. The shots crashed against Rocklin's ears, roared through his head, stunning him.

"That does it," Bart said. "Let's mosey."

He holstered his gun, strode to his horse, mounted. He swung away at once. The others followed, staring at Rocklin's now loosely sprawled form, leaving the roan behind.

They were soon swallowed by the darkness, and Rocklin stirred.

He forced himself into a sitting position, and held his head in his hands. He was suddenly very sick, and afterward lay back weak and shaken. He sank into a tormented sleep and was plagued by nightmares.

He heard himself yelling and cursing, and then he heard a girl with honey-colored hair and crystal-clear gray eyes laughing at him. He was mobbed by countless hardcases, all looking like Matt Tabor. He saw himself chasing a whole horde of pigtailed Chinese, then there was Teddy Roosevelt and Bart in their Rough Rider uniforms and waving sabers. Fred Amberton haunted him, with Blackstone in one hand and a bottle in the other. Charlie Hutch peered at him from a myriad of hiding places . . . He woke up drenched by a clammy sweat.

The sun was high, bright in a brassy sky.

His roan horse wasn't far off, grazing on some sparse bunch grass.

He picked himself up and stood swaying like a drunken cowhand. His head started throbbing all over again. His vision was blurry. He took a couple of lurching steps, and his knees buckled. He rose again, with great effort, and gained a few more yards toward his horse.

He crawled the last few yards, then the roan spooked and shied away. He swore thinly, crawled some more. The roan snorted, moved away again. He caught hold of the left stirrup finally, and hung on. The horse tried to kick him. He talked to it as to a baby: "Nice boy . . . Good old Buck." And: "Damn you, horse!" He inched his grip up the stirrup. He hauled himself to his feet, sagged against the animal, reached for the horn. The roan shied away again, dumping him to the ground.

He kept at it, and this was another nightmare.

He was growing weaker, and the desert sun was beginning to torture him. He finally caught the trailing reins, but then lacked the strength to rise. He lay there holding the reins . . .

The three riders coming along the trail left by Bart and the others found him like that. They dismounted, and one knelt beside him. Water from a canteen spilled down his throat, and he choked on it. He saw their faces then, two men and a woman. Two cowhands and the girl. She was wearing her range clothes again.

"Belle," he said thickly. "That you?"

"Yes."

"For sure?"

"For sure," she said. She gave him another short drink from the canteen. "I didn't expect to find you alive. I didn't go up to my room last night. I was curious about you. I followed you and Amberton to the livery stable, hoping to find out what you were up to. I watched from across the street, but you didn't come out. Amberton came out alone, staggering, yelling bloody murder. Jim Norman, the marshal, came running—and a crowd. Amberton told how you and he had been jumped, and that you'd disappeared while he was unconscious. They searched the stable and didn't find you—or anybody else. They figured Amberton was drunk again."

Belle paused, gave Rocklin some more water.

Then she went on. "I worried about it. I went to my hotel room, changed clothes, got my horse from the stable, rode home to my ranch. I took Kelly and Pete to town with me, and at dawn we cut for

sign. We saw how four horses had left by the back door. It was easy to track them out here to the malpais. On the way we saw three hombres heading toward town. They steered clear of us. So we found you. How is it they didn't finish the job, Rocklin?"

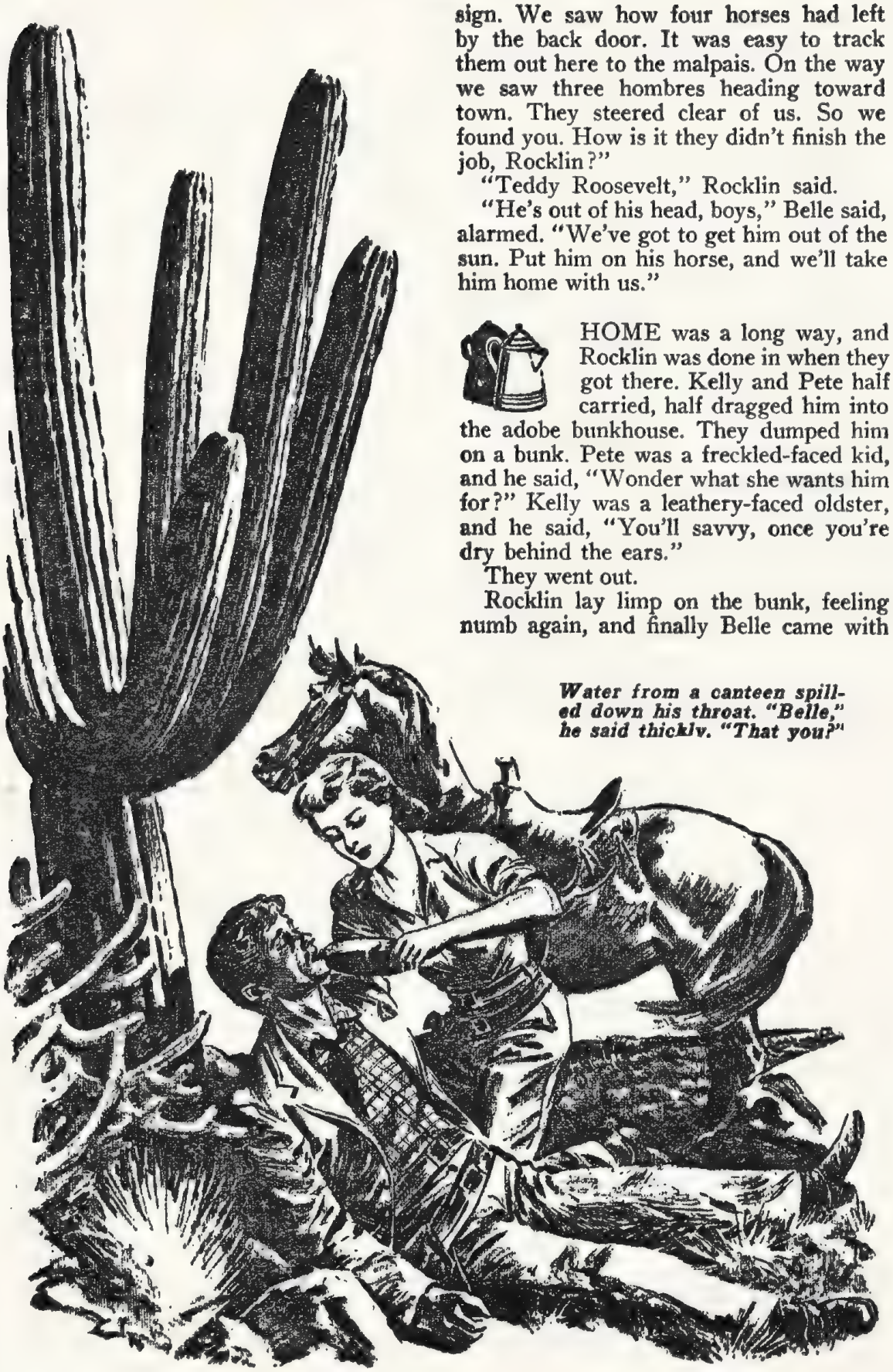
"Teddy Roosevelt," Rocklin said.

"He's out of his head, boys," Belle said, alarmed. "We've got to get him out of the sun. Put him on his horse, and we'll take him home with us."

HOME was a long way, and Rocklin was done in when they got there. Kelly and Pete half carried, half dragged him into the adobe bunkhouse. They dumped him on a bunk. Pete was a freckled-faced kid, and he said, "Wonder what she wants him for?" Kelly was a leathery-faced oldster, and he said, "You'll savvy, once you're dry behind the ears."

They went out.

Rocklin lay limp on the bunk, feeling numb again, and finally Belle came with



Water from a canteen spilled down his throat. "Belle," he said thickly. "That you?"

a coffee pot and a cup. She had to hold the cup while Rocklin sipped the hot, black coffee. It was all he could do to lever himself up on his elbows. "More?" Belle asked, when the cup was empty.

"Later," Rocklin said, lying back. "*Muchisimas gracias*, Belle."

She remained seated on the edge of the bunk.

"How bad do you feel, Rocklin?"

"Sick as a dog."

"A doctor?"

"Not yet," he said hoarsely. "I'll see, after I rest. Why'd you come after me, baby?"

Belle said sharply, "Stop calling me by those silly terms of endearment. You don't give them any meaning, anyway. Who were those men, Rocklin?"

"Charlie Hutch hired them to kill me, out where it's quiet."

"Why didn't they kill you?"

"One of them served under Roosevelt during the Spanish-American War," Rocklin said. "When he saw my commission was signed by the President, he took me for some sort of a *compadre*. He pumped three shots into the ground instead of into me. The others didn't catch on." He rested a moment, then continued, "Hutch must think he's rid of me for good. Unless he learns otherwise from you."

"Don't talk like a fool, Rocklin. I saved your life."

"You did. But why?"

"Maybe because I'm something of a fool, too," Belle said. "So I chased after you, worried crazy that I'd find you dead." She slipped off the bunk when he reached out a weak hand, stood looking down at him. "I didn't know what you were the other day at the *rancho*. I was scared and lost my head when I saw that shotgun—and realized what would have happened if I'd gotten there before you and opened that door. What kind of a lawman are you? A United States marshal?"

"No. I'm with the Immigration Bureau."

"Smuggling?"

"Yes. I was hunting Charlie Hutch because he's a member of an organization smuggling Chinese across the Border," Rocklin told her. "The organization is headed by a man called *El Sombro*. I figured that I could force Hutch to tell me who *El Sombro* is."

"And you thought I was one of that crowd?"

"That's about it, Belle."

"I'm not," she said. "And I never was."

She turned to the table, took up the coffee pot, started toward the door. She faced him again, and said, "Well, I guess you know who *El Sombro* is now."

"Can't say that I do."

"You can't be very bright then, Rocklin."

"Maybe you know."

"I can guess," Belle replied. "Call it a woman's intuition, if you like. But the sign is pretty plain. You were jumped by a bunch of toughs in the livery stable. Charlie Hutch hired them. Who got you to go to the livery stable?"

"Fred Amberton told me that Hutch was there."

"Well?" said Belle, and went out.

Rocklin thought about it, and muttered, "I'll be damned!" He thought about it some more, and argued with himself that it wasn't possible. Amberton too had been jumped by those hired toughs of Charlie Hutch's, and beaten to the ground. Too, on the way to the livery stable Amberton had suggested that they take the town marshal along.

Still, Amberton knew that Rocklin was in the habit of playing a lone hand. And Rocklin couldn't be sure that Amberton had actually taken a beating. It could have been rigged, to make Amberton's part in the affair look lily white.

Fred Amberton was a lawyer, and Rocklin had an idea that a lawyer's mind was trained to work in devious ways. Amberton was too lazy to make a success at law, so it might follow that his evident prosperity came from being the contact man between the Six Companies and the men who smuggled the Chinese into the country. Being *El Sombro* would take some cleverness but not much effort. Too, Amberton had offered him a bribe the minute he walked into the lawyer's office. All that talk about a client he wouldn't name . . . Amberton's client could be the Six Companies.

It was something to think about.

Rocklin thought about it until his weakness overcame him and he slept.

He was so done in that he slept through what was left of the day and through the night, waking as the sun came up. He was alone in the bunkhouse, and he had the feeling that he had been alone all night—that the two cowhands, Kelly and Pete, hadn't slept there. He pulled on his boots, stood up, and he felt better except for a dull headache. There was a slip of paper on the table, a note from Belle. It read: "When you're hungry, go over to the house and rustle up some chuck."

He went outside, drew water at the well, washed up.

There was a small adobe house across the ranchyard, smoke curling lazily from its chimney. His roan horse was on the corral, alone. His saddle was atop the corral fence. He looked out over the range, saw a bunch of horses in a fenced meadow and scattered bunches of cattle in the distance. But no riders.

Belle had left a fire in the cookstove, flapjack batter in a bowl, bacon in a skillet, coffee in a pot. Rocklin cooked and ate his breakfast, cleaned up the mess of dishes and cooking utensils afterward. He drifted outside, had a smoke. And he thought about Belle's pointing out that Fred Amberton had taken him to the livery stable.

Amberton, he kept thinking. *Fred Amberton—El Sombro!*

He needed to be convinced.

HIS cigarette smoked, Rocklin went to the corral. Somebody had stuffed his hat in his saddlebag. He took it out, reshaped it, put it on. He had lost his gun during the fight in the livery stable, but he kept a spare in his saddlebag. It was still there. He put it in his holster. His Winchester rifle was still in its boot. He took the rope off his saddle, and went into the corral to drop a loop on the roan.

He rode south across the range for perhaps half a dozen miles before seeing the solitary oilwell derrick jutting toward the sky. It was beyond a rocky ridge, in the center of a grassy flat.

The drilling rig was idle, the boiler cold, the pit of red driller's mud drying in the sun. There was no crew on the job.

The two cowhands, Kelly and Pete, were loafing in the shade of one of the shacks. Their rifles leaned against the shack, handy. They eyed Rocklin suspiciously.

The drilling rig looked as though it had seen its best days long ago and might be held together by baling-wire. Rocklin circled the derrick, seeing Belle beyond it with a man in a buckboard. The buckboard's team, a pair of fine matched grays, was familiar. So was the man's bulky figure.

Matt Tabor.

They were arguing, and were unaware of Rocklin until he was close.

Belle gave him a startled look, and he could see fury in her eyes. Tabor gave him a scowl, then ignored him.

Tabor said, to the girl, "That's my proposition. Take it or leave it, but make up your mind now. I don't like to be kept dangling. What is it—yes or no?"

Belle stood with her hands in the pockets of her levis, her feet wide apart, her blonde head held high. "All right, Matt," she said huskily. "It's no. You push too hard a bargain."

"Then you're done for, Belle—you're finished."

"I guess you're right, Matt."

"There's a big bunch of tough hands coming tonight," Tabor said, "and without my help you won't be able to keep them from seizing this drilling rig."

"It's still no, Matt."

"Why? Because of this saddle bum here?"

"No," said Belle. "Because I couldn't go through with it."

Tabor swore, gave Rocklin an ugly look, then slapped at the grays with his reins and drove off. Belle didn't look after him. She stared at the ground. Rocklin heard her sigh.

"What's the trouble, Belle?" Rocklin asked.

"Nothing that would interest you."

"Anything that concerns you interests me," he told her.

She gave him a bitter look. "Sometimes I hate men," she said fiercely. "They'll help each other out, but let a woman ask for help—and they take it for granted that she's offering to sell herself. Sure, he'd help me. He'd see that I got my well drilled. All I'd have to do was be nice to him. Damn him. Damn all men!"

Rocklin didn't say anything.

She gazed up at him angrily. "Sure, I know what you're thinking. I asked for it. I rigged myself up like a fancy woman and played up to him. I gave him the notion that I was willing to be nice. All right. I'm to blame. But I didn't go through with it, did I?"

"What's the trouble, Belle?"

"I was swindled by a tinhorn promoter," she retorted. "I was taken in, played for a sucker. Now I'm broke, and saddled with a mortgage on the ranch. All I've got is a dry hole twelve hundred feet deep—and a broken-down drilling rig that a bunch of toughs will take away from me unless Kelly and Pete and I can drive them off!"

"Take it easy, baby," Rocklin said. "Tell me about it."

"Stop calling me 'baby'!" she flared up. "You and Matt Tabor! The two of you would make a good team!"

Her lip quivered, and suddenly there were tears in her eyes. She was her real self now, just a ranch girl with trouble she couldn't cope with. She began to tell him about the trouble.

It wasn't a new story.

Matt Tabor and a few other smart operators had tied up the Altura oil field, and the shoestringing promoters hadn't been able to get even a toehold on the boom.

The little operators had been forced to go far afield, gambling on leases and test holes that failed to pay off even to the ranchers owning the land. Belle had been talked into a lease by a slicker named Steve Clayton.

Clayton was to pay for the lease only if he brought in a well, and he cut loose as soon as he had Belle's signature on the agreement. He sent in the drilling rig and a crew. He formed a company which he called The Belle Rancho Petroleum Company. He had handsomely engraved stock certificates printed, and, leaving the crew on the lease, he had hustled about selling the stock.

He'd even talked Belle into buying some of the Belle Rancho stock. She'd invested five thousand dollars, most of it raised on a mortgage.

The crew had loafed on the job and there'd been a lot of trouble with the old wildcatter rig.

But that hadn't bothered Clayton. He hadn't believed—Belle learned too late—that there was oil beneath her land. He hadn't cared if there was oil. He hadn't wanted to bring in a well. Clayton was a crook, and he was simply pulling a profitable swindle.

Belle said bitterly, "The crew disappeared one night about two weeks ago. I went to town and tried to find Clayton. I talked to Matt Tabor. He told me what had happened. He knew Clayton. But he offered to help me. He learned that Clayton had skipped to Mexico, with more than a hundred thousand dollars from the sale of the stock."

Rocklin grunted with surprise.

Belle continued, "I was desperate enough to play up to Matt Tabor, hoping that he would have one of his crews sink the well for me. I know there is oil here. I feel it. I would have paid him back. But he—well, he pushes too hard a bargain. I finally thought that maybe I could do something about Clayton. Old Esteban de Baca was my father's friend. I thought that he would go to Mexico and try to locate that swindler for me. But . . . Oh, I'm licked all right. I may as well admit it!"

"You've still got the ranch, haven't you, Belle?"

"And a mortgage!" she said. "But I'm not just thinking of myself. I keep worrying about all the people who bought Belle Rancho stock. All the trusting little people who invested their savings in pieces of worthless paper. I feel to blame!"

"A job for a manhunter," Rocklin said. "Finding Clayton, I mean."

Belle stared at him with sudden hope in her eyes.

"You, Rocklin?"

"I could try." He straightened in the saddle, said, "We'll talk about that later. Maybe I won't find Clayton. I've a hunch I won't. He probably headed for the nearest Mexican port and took a boat for some other country." He lifted the roan's reins. "But I still may be able to help you."

He rode away, thinking about Willie Hu.

And of the bribe the old Chinese had offered him.

Willie Hu might like to invest in an oil-well rather than in a ranch.

CHAPTER V

ONE DEAD AND ONE TO GO

ROCKLIN followed wagon tracks south toward Altura, traveling at a walk. His slow pace wasn't due to his still painful head alone. He was lost in uneasy thought, not liking the thing he meant to do. Sure, he had promised himself that he would resign his job once he had found *El Sombro* and smashed the smuggling ring. But Willie Hu didn't know that, and if he accepted a bribe under false pretenses that would make him another kind of a crook. It would be known all through Arizona, in due time. And his friends—the boys in the Immigration Service and the Customs Service, and all the lawmen and all the law-abiding men he'd been *compadres* with—would always claim that he'd sold out. They'd curse his name for having turned crooked because of a girl, and he'd be a pariah. Rocklin knew that he'd curse himself, in the end.

A gunshot jolted him abruptly out of his reverie.

He grabbed his rifle from his boot and dropped from the saddle. He dived instinctively for a cluster of boulders, landed on his stomach. He heard a high-pitched, almost shrill voice, swearing obscenely. Charlie Hutch's voice. The man's voice always sounded like a nervous woman's when he got mad or scared. Another voice reached Rocklin on the still air when Hutch shut up, in a Southern drawl, saying, "My gun went off purely by accident, Mistah Hutch."

Bart's voice.

Hutch cursed the Southerner some more, calling him a double-crosser and reminding him of how he'd failed to finish Rocklin off the other night.

Rocklin had his bearings now, and his position wasn't too bad. It was a stretch of rocky country. The bushwhackers were on a boulder-strewn slope within easy rifle range. Another minute or two, and he would have ridden into the trap. As it was now, he flanked their position from cover as adequate as the rocks in which they were forted up. He had a glimpse of one man darting for better cover.

Charlie Hutch stopped haranguing Bart, and opened fire with his rifle. Two other guns opened up. Slugs shrieked, thudded, ricochetted. Rocklin held his fire, hugged his boulder. The first flurry of wild shooting let up, and then he ventured a look. He saw Hutch's gaunt face as the man settled down to do some careful sniping. It was Hutch he wanted, and he let the man squeeze out three shots that came perilously close. Then Rocklin's .30-30 cracked for the first time.

Hutch screamed and dropped from sight.

There was a long moment of brittle quiet, two men went scurrying along the slope in sudden flight. Rocklin drove a couple shots after them, then they jumped from a ledge and vanished. A minute later Rocklin heard a pounding of hoofs as the pair rode away.

He waited, listening to Hutch moaning.

After a long time the hardcase was quiet, and Rocklin risked showing himself. No more shots came from the slope, and he crossed to its base. Climbing, he now saw the amiable looking Bart lounging against a huge rock slab. The Southerner was unconcernedly rolling a cigarette. Rocklin shifted his rifle to his left hand and drew his Colt as he approached Hutch's position. He rounded a cluster of rocks, saw Hutch crouched there with his gun ready. The smuggler's gaunt face was bloody from a bullet crease along the side of his head. There was a crazy look in his eyes. He fired an instant too soon. Rocklin's shot followed, the slug catching Charlie Hutch in the heart. Hutch toppled over, dead, and Rocklin whirled toward Bart.

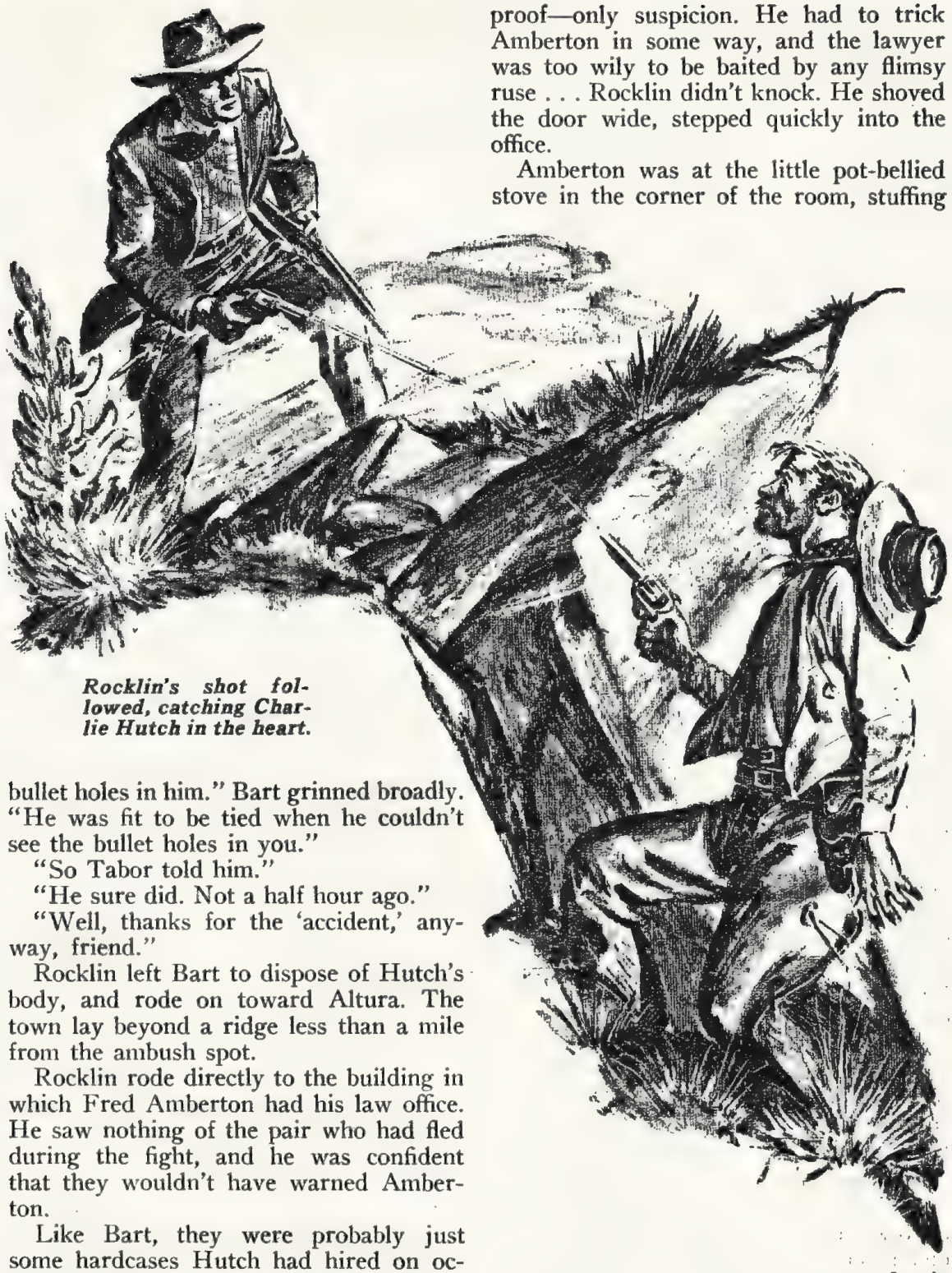
Bart grinned, lighted his cigarette. "It was a fair fight, I reckon," he said. "Lucky for you my gun went off by accident, mistah."

"Look, friend," Rocklin said. "Just what is your game?"

"I'm just dodging work I don't happen to like."

"How'd Hutch know I was alive—and riding this way?"

"A Mistah Tabor done told him," Bart said. "And we came a-riding out here in a hurry. Mistah Hutch was sure riled up when he heard you were alive. Couldn't hardly believe it—a man living with three



Rocklin's shot followed, catching Charlie Hutch in the heart.

bullet holes in him." Bart grinned broadly. "He was fit to be tied when he couldn't see the bullet holes in you."

"So Tabor told him."

"He sure did. Not a half hour ago."

"Well, thanks for the 'accident,' anyway, friend."

Rocklin left Bart to dispose of Hutch's body, and rode on toward Altura. The town lay beyond a ridge less than a mile from the ambush spot.

Rocklin rode directly to the building in which Fred Amberton had his law office. He saw nothing of the pair who had fled during the fight, and he was confident that they wouldn't have warned Amberton.

Like Bart, they were probably just some hardcases Hutch had hired on occasion. They wouldn't know that Fred Amberton was *El Sombro.*

Mounting the steps at the side of the building, Rocklin felt some doubt. If he was *El Sombro,* Amberton would deny the accusation and challenge Rocklin to prove it.

With Hutch dead, Rocklin had no proof—only suspicion. He had to trick Amberton in some way, and the lawyer was too wily to be baited by any flimsy ruse . . . Rocklin didn't knock. He shoved the door wide, stepped quickly into the office.

Amberton was at the little pot-bellied stove in the corner of the room, stuffing papers into it. There was as yet no fire in the stove.

Amberton whirled, a frightened look on his flabby face.

"Ed!" he gasped. Then, forcing a smile: "Ed, you gave me a fright!"

"Let's not try to fool each other, Fred," Rocklin said. "And don't touch a match

to those papers. Get away from that stove."

"Ed, what is this?"

"I've got Charlie Hutch, Fred. He named *El Sombro.*"

Amberton looked as though he'd been hit hard in the guts. He staggered over to his desk, leaned heavily against it. Somebody appeared at the doorway behind Rocklin. Glancing over his shoulder, Rocklin saw that it was old Willie Hu. A desk drawer was jerked noisily open. Rocklin looked back at Amberton, saw him grab a gun from the drawer. It was hard to do, for once they had been friends. But Rocklin drew and fired, his shot blasting along with Amberton's. The lawyer fell without a sound escaping him, dead before he hit the floor. Rocklin looked down at him through a haze of gunsmoke, almost sadly.

He hadn't forgotten Willie Hu. He didn't fear him, for he had never encountered a Chinese who put up a fight. He said, "A dirty game, Willie. He should never have taken a hand in it. I've nothing on you. If I had, I'd sure as hell take you in."

"The ranch, Mister Rocklin . . ."

Rocklin turned and stared at him, and said savagely, "You get the hell on out of here!"

MARSHAL Jim Norman came, and accepted Rocklin's explanation that he had killed Amberton in self-defense. The town lawman was surprised to learn that the lawyer had been involved in alien smuggling. But he didn't doubt it, once he and Rocklin had examined the documents —letters from and copies of reports to the Six Companies—that Amberton had intended to destroy.

Rocklin next saw the undertaker and arranged for Amberton's burial, then he went to the office building of the Globe Petroleum Company. He brushed past the clerks in the outer room, entered Matt Tabor's private office unannounced, surprised the oil king at his desk.

"So you put Charlie Hutch onto me, Matt?"

"I mentioned that I'd seen you," Tabor admitted.

"I owe you something for that."

A trace of uneasiness showed on Tabor's ruddy face. "What?" he asked.

"A beating would satisfy me," Rocklin said. "The beating of your life, Matt. But I'm going to forego the pleasure—on condition."

"Name it, Rocklin. I didn't know you, didn't remember you, until I saw you out at Belle's ranch," Tabor said. "And I saw then that Belle . . . Well, I didn't have a chance with her. I'm not as young as you. And the other night I learned that I wasn't as tough as you. So I put Hutch onto you. But I'm a reasonable man—and I value my hide. Name the condition."

"Drill that well for Belle."

"Well, I'll be damned," Tabor said, chuckling. "All right, Rocklin. I'll do it. I believe there may be oil out there. If we bring in a well, however, I'll want a deal that will cut me in on the profits."

"Fair enough."

"Anything else?"

"One thing more," Rocklin said. "You said something about a tough crew going out there tonight to take over that drilling rig."

"That's right," Tabor replied. "Clayton sold that rig to another sharper. This fellow was chased off by Belle's cowhands a couple days ago. He intends to get the rig tonight."

"Stop him, Matt."

"That'll cost me money," Tabor said. "Maybe I'd better take that beating." He stood up, reached across the desk, offered his hand. "It's a deal, Rocklin," he said, smiling. "But only because I don't happen to be ten years younger."

They shook on it, and then Rocklin left him.

It was sundown when he got back to the idle drilling rig on Belle Marvin's range. Old Kelly was standing guard. Young Pete had taken the horses to a nearby creek to water them. Belle was in the shack, busy cooking supper. She turned to Rocklin with a smudge of flour on her cheek and a wisp of honey-colored hair hanging loosely over her forehead. She was wearing a washed-out flour sack for an apron. She was exactly what a man would enjoy finding in his kitchen when he came in off the range evenings.

"Amberton?"

"You were right about him."

"It's settled then?"

Rocklin nodded. "And I'm resigning my job," he told her. "I'll take a look around down in Mexico. With luck, I may catch up with that Clayton hombre. But you don't need to worry. Matt Tabor is sending a crew to make hole here, and he's going to see that nobody comes to take this drilling rig away from you." He saw her eyes grow round, a startled look in them. "Don't worry," he added. "Matt's attaching no strings. He gave his word. I'll hold him to it."

Belle looked suddenly weak. She sank down onto a bench.

"And you?" she asked huskily. "What strings are you attaching?"

"Matt thinks there's oil here," Rocklin said. "When you're rich, you can show your appreciation to me by buying me a watch or—" he grinned at her—"or something else I don't need."

"When are you starting for Mexico?"

"Right now."

"Ed . . ."

"Yeah?"

"You know why I followed you to the badlands and was so worried I'd find you dead?" she asked. She didn't wait for him to answer. "It was because of—of what went on inside me when you kissed me. Ed, are you another Matt Tabor—or are you the marrying kind?"

Rocklin thought that over. "Lately, I guess I'm the marrying kind."

Belle stood up, came close, smiling. "At least wait until after supper to leave, won't you?" she said.

"Baby," Rocklin said, reaching for her, "Mexico can wait."

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OWNER'S INTERESTS

By
LESLIE C. BURBRIDGE

ILLUSTRATED BY
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"You old villain — you've poisoned me!" croaked the luckless shipowner.

AN ODD state of affairs existed in the master's dayroom of the *Pagan Prince.*

Viewing from behind, any competent geologist would instantly have pronounced Captain Jeremiah Jimble as being completely petrified. His puny frame sat rigid in his chair. His head was motionless, its bald and shining dome a credit to any lapidary. Both arms stretched out straight and skinny as cargo booms to where his two withered fists rested on the desktop. The few whiskers straggling aside from his ragged goatee were visible from astern, poised unruffled in the close air of the tiny cabin. The impression was that of a man transfixed with horror.

Several things could have accounted for this curious condition. The *Pagan Prince's* general ghastliness might suddenly have overcome the captain whilst in a low state of mind. At the best of

times you do not encounter much beauty in three-thousand-ton freighters, and as the *Pagan Prince* had wallowed across the oceans for close on fifty years, she was of that ugly duckling vintage which sours rather than mellows with age.

She was barrel-sided, with the fantail of a deformed duck and the bows of a decadent dowager. Her woodbine smoke stack reared up from the hen-house fiddley with a rake that was stylish at the turn of the century, and her pole topmasts echoed the quaint angle high into the heavens.

Her ancient stock anchors, her narrow hatchways and her primitive cargo gear had driven many a mate to distraction, whilst down below a long succession of despairing engineers had fought a close-won battle with the archaic heap of machinery that gasped, coughed and grumbled unceasingly over its seven knot assignment.

All these trying points could suddenly have triumphed over Captain Jimble's fortitude, but as he had skippered the ancient craft for nigh on thirty years, and had built up a sympathetic affinity for his venerable charge, this seemed unlikely.

His condition could have been due to the latest inanity of Archie Hicks, his featherbrained mate. Yet the captain was fond of explaining that one idiot was necessary in every crew as a measuring stick for the remainder's sanity. When that dolt happened to be the mate, why, then it gave such a master as Captain Jeremiah Jimble wonderful scope in which to exercise his genius as a maritime Fixit.

But there again, Archie had sailed with him for ten years—cursed but cherished—and time only added to the improbability of any sudden revulsion.

There was the final possibility that Dusty Miller had imperiled his chief engineer's standing with a fresh alcoholic indiscretion. But not even this would have afflicted the captain so grievously, since he went to great lengths retaining him in the ship. Who else would be so much in keeping with his machinery? If Dusty Miller was often strange in his behavior, did that not make him blood brother with his engines? It seemed to Captain Jimble that only a man of Miller's dogged debauchery was a suitable shipmate for the degenerate junk in the engineroom.

No. None of the oddities natural to the life of the *Pagan Prince* would have accounted for the captain's eloquent paralysis. Something far more dreadful than the dubious phenomena of his cranky command had frozen him with horror. *Someone had entered his sacred sanctum without knocking and awaiting the royal assent!*

IF THERE was no evidence of breathing on Captain Jimble's part it was fully compensated by the gusty pantings of the human barrel attired in sober business rig who stood just within the door, glaring angrily at the captain's back, and momentarily speechless through a combination of wrath and shortness of breath.

The condition did not last long. The moment the pendulous jowls ceased flapping like the gills of a stranded fish, the human barrel gave tongue.

"Captain Jimble! D'ye call this sailing at noon?"

Considering that it was the voice of Samuel Kellow, the Owner, the captain reacted with marked disrespect. Leaping from his chair like a human firecracker, he whipped around and fixed his visitor with a piercing stare. "You didn't knock!" he piped accusingly.

"This is no time for that nonsense, Jimble! You've a close cancelling date for the charter following this grain cargo from Puerto Madariago—and I've just heard that the *Persian City* clears on this same tide for the same port. If she gets there first she'll shut us off the berth and the delay will lose us our next charter!"

Captain Jimble's spare form was not a promising perch for anger, but it was amazing what he achieved. His bald head flew back, his goatee beard shot forward in bristling challenge, his beady little squirrel's eyes glinted fiercely, and his whole face opened and shut rapidly as the rubbery cave of his toothless mouth went to work on the Owner.

"Proper respect! Proper respect for the master—that's what I must have! I command your vessel, Sam Kellow, so just don't lose your head and do anything to undermine my authority. It takes all

me time to keep your vessel under control and I'll not have any derby-hatted landlubber interfering!"

"Interfering! With my own ship? You're—you're fired. Jimble. D'ye hear me? You're fired, fired!"

"Bah!" rejoined the captain, sweeping the outburst aside as so much froth. "For thirty years ye've been firing me every voyage. And I don't go. D'ye hear me, Sam Kellow? I don't go! For why? Because no one else would cart your miserable old coffin-ship around. No one but me, Jeremiah Jimble, could perform such a miracle. No one else would risk their life and sanity let alone their professional reputation for the pittance you pay. Only me with me own special genius can keep her running and make the job worthwhile to meself. And it pleases me to work my will on your damned old crock, so let's hear no more of this ridiculous firing blather!"

With Jimble's bony forefinger poking him into deflation and the ragged goatee fanning his purple face, Samuel Kellow backed up a pace. "Well, you know what I mean, Captain," he said. "Only I'm worried. Your salary may be, ahem, modest; but there's not a lot of fat left on the ship and if we trip up over this cancelling date, I'm afraid we're sunk."

"That's better—a little," conceded Captain Jimble, slightly mollified. "I'll accept that as an apology. We'll be sailing when my crew is complete. I'm just waiting for Mr. Miller."

"Miller! You're holding the ship up for that drunken pig-iron polisher? You must be mad! I can go out and find you a dozen engineers right now. We've got to get the ship away, I'm telling you—the *Persian City* is nearly as fast as we are, practically a seven knot ship—in fine weather. I tell you it's going to be touch and go, you boneheaded old fool!"

"Boneheaded old fool?" screamed the captain. "Just for that, I quit. And there'll be trouble on the gangplank. It'll not be wide enough. My crew won't be content to follow me down it—they'll want to go off with me on a broad front. Out of my way, you addlebrained old windbag—I'm packing!"

Just what would would have transpired without the blessed hand of Fate remains obscure, for at that moment there sounded the jangling of the engineroom telegraph, followed by a shuddering throughout the ship. Captain Jimble ceased his whirling dervish act; Samuel Kellow unclenched his pudgy fists, and both men stared at each other. The captain was the first to break the silence.

"There she goes," he said. "Mr. Miller must be aboard. The pilot was only waiting for him. There's something in having a "choice" pilot—he understands our little ways and doesn't need me at his elbow. He's been standing by up there for the last hour—hanging on for the chief. Now are you satisfied?"

"You—you crazy old goat; how'm I going to get ashore?" squealed the Owner.

"That's for you to figure out," chuckled the captain, twitching his goldlaced hat to a raffish angle and making for the door. "Out of my way—I've responsibilities to attend to. And if ye've any thoughts of coming to the bridge, ye can drop them until we're in the fairway. I don't allow idle office wallahs up there with delicate maneuvers going on!"

LEAVING the deflated Owner staring blankly after him, Captain Jimble departed blithely for the bridge. The *Pagan Prince* backed and filled to the accompaniment of much watery bleating from her cockbilled steam whistle. It seemed to take a long time before she was clear of the berth. Mr. Kellow dared a peep out on deck and was mystified to discover the ship practically stationary, with her engines threshing astern. From the amount of mud swirling along from aft it was obvious even to a landsman that the ship was flirting with the bottom. From the general drift of the bad language floating down from the bridge it was equally obvious that the villainies of some other ship had caused that flirtation.

Mr. Kellow, ever one to shut his eyes to painful spectacles, crept back into the captain's room without acquainting himself further with the situation and tried not to think of the delay and wasted bunkers. Instead he turned his thoughts to the various means of getting ashore, and his attention was only dragged back to the ship's affairs when the settled

rhythm of the engines announced their normal occupation of pushing the ship along at a steady seven knots.

With clean fires and a full head of steam there was no holding her, thought Captain Jimble as he lovingly studied the lie of the bow wave. It was the best log the ship had. When it tumbled out from the break of the forecastle head, that meant six and a half. Seven sent it flying out from the shoulder chocks. Half speed let it sag almost back to the bridge. Now it was slightly ahead of the shoulder chocks and the captain was thrilled with the secret suspicion that she was hitting up seven and an onion. He'd show that old fool Kellow what his pet chief engineer could do once he got going!

As if in answer to his thoughts, the pathetic face of the Owner showed pleadingly at the foot of the bridge ladder.

"You may come up now, Mr. Kellow," conceded the captain, graciously.

Samuel Kellow mounted to the bridge, breathing stertorously and obviously keeping his temper in check by a narrow margin.

"When'll we be down to the Cutter?" he demanded.

"Couple more hours," said the pilot.

"Two hours—to do ten miles?" the Owner yelped. "We're going full speed, aren't we?"

"Oh yes—but there's another ship, the *Persian City*, ahead . . ."

"*Ahead?* How did that happen?" broke in the Owner.

"Well . . . she pulled a mean one on us," said the pilot. "Swung across our starboard bow and put us by. We fetched up on the mud for a bit—and when we got up, the *Persian City* was well away. We . . . we did a bit of damage to a lighter getting away."

"I saw that grinning little whippersnapper Prebble waving to us from his bridge," Captain Jimble added. "I'll have to see to him in due course. I'll—"

"Never mind all that," snapped Mr. Kellow impatiently. "We can open her up and pass her again, can't we?"

"Not in the channel," said the pilot.

"Since when?" demanded the Owner.

"It's in the by-laws, the River by-laws," retorted the pilot.

"By-laws! You mean to stand there and tell me you stick at footling by-laws when you're my "choice" pilot, chosen to get my ships in and out of port regardless of obstacles in the best possible time?"

The pilot slowly removed a reeking briar from his mouth and stared coldly at the Owner.

"As I get it," he began in measured tones, "you pay me my retainer to keep your ship out of trouble—every kind of trouble. The River Commissioners are down in their inspection launch today. D'ye want that I should break their by-laws right alongside of them, with you on board? Give it to me in writing and I'll be delighted to oblige!"

Mr. Kellow's sphere of existence being only human, it was subject to finite limitations and it now appeared that where his temper was concerned, these were rather too close set for present needs.

"You quibbling old idiot!" he howled. "You're out. Fired! You're not the choice pilot for the Kellow Line any more. You're—you're—"

"And you're stuck!" interrupted the pilot. "You'll not land in the Cutter with me, you paunchy old pest: that's a privilege we only extend to "choice" Owners —at the discretion of the pilot involved. I wish you a pleasant voyage."

The broad back of the pilot and the innocent whistling of Captain Jimble as he stared blandly at the Owner yanked the last props of restraint from his shaky temper. Flinging his derby to the deck he jumped on it several times, finally whipping it up and flinging it overboard.

"Going after it?" inquired the pilot, sourly. "That's about the only way you'll be getting ashore I'm thinking."

"There are launches!" screeched Mr. Kellow. "We'll anchor. Yes—that's what we'll do. We'll anchor and radio back for a launch."

CAPTAIN Jimble sighed patiently. "Ye'll have to be instructed in many matters, Samuel Kellow," he said. "Firstly, there's no anchorage between here and the pilot station. Secondly we're still within the Port limits and Regulations will not allow the radio to be used except in real emergency. It'll be two more hours before you can send for a

launch. Then it'll take two or three more to get action and another three to get down to us. I make that seven or eight hours at the least. That'll put the *Persian City* another fifty odd miles ahead of us. Would you wish that?"

"Regulations! Blasted by-laws—that's all I hear!"

"It's what you write about a good deal," observed the captain acidly. "Letter Number 27 from your office preaches a whole page about Regulations—with enough unwritten between the lines to tell me I'll be shot if I hinder the ship for them. Nice for the record—awkward for me. Owner ye may be—but to me you're little better than a stowaway. Your letter Number 31 tells me exactly how harsh to be with them."

"You've shanghaied me!" raged the Owner.

"Ye'll get off my bridge!" ordered Captain Jimble with immense dignity. "I can't allow such distracting conduct in front of my pilot and helmsman. The mate will show you the spare cabin, and it's my orders that ye stay there. I've a strapping bosun for a master-at-arms. At my orders he'll deal ruggedly with any insubordination. It will remind ye that I know how to carry out my Owner's instructions!"

Fuming inwardly but with a judicious outward restraint the Owner slunk down the bridge ladder. The *Pagan Prince* continued on her way seaward with the *Persian City* a short lead ahead. By nightfall the pilot had departed, the land faded astern, and the ship was set on her course across the ocean. Somewhere ahead lay Puerto Madariago and all its special problems.

For such a small port, those problems were remarkably complex. There was only one berth for wheat cargoes and the port administration was much subject to the effects of palm grease. Captain Jimble reviewed his chequered knowledge of the port and grew grim whilst Mr. Kellow, with what little store of philosophy he could call upon, resigned himself to the voyage.

"Perhaps, after all, it may not be a bad thing for me to see things for myself," he said. "I am not at all satisfied that the ship has been run in my best interests."

"That's as may be," Captain Jimble snapped. "But I'm glad ye're seeing reason. I'll release you from the perilous disgrace of being a stowaway and sign ye on decently."

"Ah yes," agreed Mr. Kellow. "Shall we make it as supercargo—or Purser? That would be a very suitable rating for a business man of my, ah—important standing."

"Supercargo fiddlesticks! I'll have ye know there's no rating at sea for landlubbers. There's nothing lowly enough in the whole Ship's Articles for a nautical parasite. But so far as I recall there's nothing on the Statute Book to revoke the ancient rating of scullion, so I'll make it that. Samuel Kellow, aged 56, scullion. That'll sound well in shipping circles should you ever be rash enough to goad me into revealing it."

Doctors recommend long sea voyages for effecting a change in difficult patients, and from the fact that Mr. Kellow—after rather less than a day—was already tractable or prudent enough not to oppose the captain's dictates, it would seem to be an effective treatment.

It is possible that the enormousness of the stakes at issue may have had something to do with this transition. Nothing short of a maritime miracle would save the charter, and it must have dawned on Mr. Kellow that the time had now arrived for a little conciliation. The captain had given a kingly consent to his radio home announcing a last minute decision to go on the voyage, and for the rest there was little left but to make the best of a bad job.

"I'll give ye a chance to see at first hand just what a pestiferous old humbug your ship can be at times," said Jimble. "All these windy letters ye keep sending me beginning . . . 'I fail to understand why . . .' and 'Please explain this, and that, and the other'—ye'll not need to write them for the next few weeks. Ye'll see and learn for yourself. Ye'll be a better and wiser man for it, I hope."

The more uncomfortable aspects of the ship's pestiferousness became dismally apparent to Mr. Kellow very early in the voyage, when the elements seemed suddenly to resent the *Pagan Prince's* offensive presence. The wind pushed her in

the face with a contemptuous hand, and the seas leaped at her with such hunger that even Captain Jimble's room became awash.

The Owner, groaning in the throes of seasickness one deck lower was in some degree indifferent to the stray sections of ocean careening sloppily across the cabin deck, where they sloshed in and out of the lower drawers, bearing a motley armada of shoes and other buoyant oddments.

Unshaven, pallid and thoroughly wretched, the Owner called weakly for the captain.

"P-please Captain Jimble—can't you slow down or something. Heave to—or run before it? I'm dying!"

"Tut-tut, Mr. Kellow!" said the captain reprovingly. "Your letter Number 46 was wholly devoted to the loss of time whilst we hove to in a gale to set a broken leg. Really I cannot allow my good nature to overrule my duties as a shipmaster. I have my Owner's interests to consider, you know! But I'll go and look in my little medicine locker. I think I have something there that might do something to—I mean, for you."

Returning a few minutes later, Captain Jimble bore tenderly a small glass of yellowish brown fluid.

"This is a powerful restorative of my own concocting," he announced. "Onion and banana wine. A wonderful draught. It will get you out and about in no time and make a wonderful difference in all cases of internal distress."

TOO FAR gone in his dreadful malady to analyze this ambiguous spiel, Mr. Kellow took the draught at one single gulp. The spiel had not lied. It certainly made the remarkable difference claimed. Whether it was an improvement or not was another matter, but in any case there was little time for the sufferer to make a critical verdict. There was a violent spluttering, a torrent of gasps and choking coughs, and the captain leaped adroitly aside in a suspiciously prompt manner.

"Y-you old villain—you've poisoned me!" croaked the luckless shipowner. "My throat's on fire—my stomach's addled—I must have air—air—quick!"

"That's it—this way," said the captain with fatherly solicitude. He obligingly helped the Owner flounder out on deck. "Get to the lee rail and hang on there. Wind in your lungs, that's what you need. And keep your eye on the horizon if you can see it. The bosun will keep his eye on you."

The bosun indeed kept his eye on him, standing happily upwind with a bubbling clay pipe smoking coolie cut plug. By the time the weather moderated later in the day, Samuel Kellow was just beginning to get his sea legs, but whether due to the captain's ministrations or to more natural causes, it would be difficult to say.

"I suppose this is why you never went to sea yourself?" said the captain on one of his gloating visits.

"Indeed not," said Mr. Kellow, mustering what little dignity his pitiful condition would allow. "It was my eyes—I'm color blind. Greens and blues and yellows all look alike to me."

"Perhaps I could fix that too?" suggested the captain eagerly.

"No thank you—I've suffered enough," said the Owner miserably.

But good weather buries privations fathoms deep, and as the *Pagan Prince* pushed southwestward with the weather warming softly and the seas growing blue and tranquil, Mr. Kellow recovered completely. He became artful enough to be the first along the deck at sunrise to gather any stray flying fish for the cook to fry into a tasty breakfast. He even grew officious again as he returned to something of his natural self.

"Fine weather for work about the deck," he observed to the captain a few days later. "It doesn't seem to me that your mate takes the best advantage of it. All this rust—can't he get something done about it? I believe I had to write to you about the condition of the decks before."

"Indeed ye did," said Captain Jimble, in a dangerous tone. "Letter Number 54 rejects my explanations that it is very difficult to chip over accommodation whilst the ship is in service. A two-watch ship like this has to respect its sleep. Howsomedever, perhaps you're right. I'll get the mate up on the matter."

Whatever the mate's deficiencies, it could never be asserted that he was slow to interpret broad hints. The captain

talked earnestly with him for a while, and the bosun foraged in his locker for the greatest assembly of chipping hammers the *Pagan Prince* had ever seen.

The soporific effects of the warm weather had for many days been working their will on Mr. Kellow, and the afternoon siesta had assumed a large and pleasant part in his daily round. On that particular afternoon, assisted by a heavy sleeping diet of split pea soup, boiled slat beef, and figgy duff, Mr. Kellow's depth of slumber could only have been measured by a fathometer.

The ghastly wrench back to full consciousness when the shattering concentration of chipping hammers exploded into violent life on the deck above his head was dreadful.

The fiendish tattoo beating so remorselessly at the drumhead of steel three feet above his recumbent form gave the Owner the waking impression that they were actually chipping his skull.

"But my dear Mr. Kellow," protested the Captain with bland surprise when the Owner arrived fuming in the captain's room. "Your letter Number 54 makes so light of what you term the trivial but necessary maintenance noises. I really can't direct what the mate does in detail—no good shipmaster does. I merely showed him your letter. It seemed to me that he was most obedient to the Owner's interests."

"Can't they chip elsewhere?" Mr. Kellow demanded.

"Well—they could go back over the engineers' quarters, but if they don't sleep they somehow don't seem to get the best out of the engines."

"Then send them right aft—far as they can go."

"Right aft," repeated the captain thoughtfully. "D'ye know, Mr. Kellow, I think you have an idea there. I'll tell the mate."

ANY MAN less obtusely preoccupied with his own comfort would have been suspicious of the captain's tame submission to yet more interference. But it seemed that the Owner still had a long and painful road to travel.

A fairly large dose of that distress was very soon delivered him when the four to eight "Blackpan watch" came on duty one man short.

"Ned Dunn is unfit for duty," explained the chief engineer. "No sleep. They were chipping over their quarters back aft in the poop: he's a very delicately balanced man—useless without his proper rest. I'm just telling you so you'll know why we're down to five knots this watch. Two men can't keep the steam."

"That's the second bit of bad news today," sighed the captain. "Sparks told me at noon that he was working the *Persian City* and that she's still a little in the lead. We've been catching up—but I'm afraid this puts the finish . . ."

"But you can put someone in Ned Dunn's place—one of the deckhands—there's always someone to spare," gabbled Mr. Kellow anxiously.

"Mr. Kellow, how do you think of these things!" said Captain Jimble admiringly. "You would have made a wonderful shipmaster. Of course we've got someone to spare—yourself!"

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"Me? Don't be ridiculous! I'm the Owner—you can't do what you like with me—on my own ship!"

"Owner? Pass me those Articles. H'mm. Just as I remembered. You're down here as a scullion. Purely a sinecure. Your letter Number 31 was very instructive in this matter. On top of that I'm empowered by the Merchant Shipping Act of 1894 to direct you to other duties as and when I consider necessary. You'd better change into something more serviceable, Mr. Kellow. The chief will show you your duties."

"You treacherous old villain! I'll not do it. You deliberately let my innocent suggestion bring about this ridiculous situation."

"Insolence to the master. Insubordination. Refusing duty—Lordy, there's no end to your crimes! It'll all have to go down in the Official Log I'm afraid," beamed Captain Jimble. "And ye'll have the pleasure of knowing it was yourself lost the ship her berth at Puerto Madariago."

Mr. Kellow had sometimes experienced nightmares following lobster suppers, but it is unlikely that any of them matched up to the horrors and sufferings of his first watch as a trimmer.

There is no better place than the stokehold of an old coal-burning tramp for the production of human devils, no closer approximation of their traditional setting in the hereafter. Mr. Kellow's waistline underwent a contraction within the next few days that would have brought tears to the eyes of a dieting duchess, but he was in no condition to appreciate this blessing.

The chief engineer seemed unaccountably concerned over his coal problems, suddenly taking the wierd notion that some old coal long buried under fresh loads must be dug out and trimmed to the stokehold before it undertook spontaneous combustion. The fact that this danger appeared limited to Mr. Kellows hours of duty was certainly curious, but perhaps not more so than the sudden abandonment of a pet theory in which the chief valued that old coal as a permanent cushion to save bunkers from shattering. Mr. Kellow was thus involved in a quota of digging, shovelling, wheelbarrowing and similiar serflike toil to an extent which left him no opportunity for discussing these peculiar points.

"There's one bright spot, Mr. Kellow," remarked the captain one evening shortly after the sleepless trimmer had recovered enough to resume his duties and so release the Owner from his self-induced purgatory. "Your efforts, combined with my special knowledge of the currents in these parts have helped us catch up on the *Persian City*. We are almost neck and neck with her according to Sparks. I suppose—if I exploit those currents and beat her to the berth and save that next charter, there'll be a bonus for me?"

"Bonus? Certainly not, you rapacious old rascal!" snapped Mr. Kellow whose temper was still somewhat disturbed by his recent sufferings. "It's bad enough making the passage out light ship without extra expense. It's your duty to accomplish these feats. Bonus indeed!"

"H'mm," said the captain, sucking in his cheeks and pursing his lips as he gazed reflectively at the Owner. "This calls for deep thought." With which enigmatic remark he departed for the bridge, there to indulge in much careful study of the chart and a painstaking perusal of the Admiralty Sailing Directions.

"Light ship—we draw little more than twelve feet six," he said to himself. "There's fourteen feet of water in the inner passage—a tricky place, but it cuts off twenty miles. The *Persian City* is too deep for that caper—it'll put us ahead nicely."

IT WAS a mercy that the long-suffering and much tormented Owner did not comprehend the hazards endured by his beloved ship two or three days later. The captain himself found little enjoyment in them whilst they lasted. Not even the most daring shipmaster enjoys ragged rocks eighteen inches below his keel, and when the clearing marks are insignificant trees in line with sundry cowsheds, and so-called conspicuous hills open east or west of somebody's steeple, there is no real certainty that you have identified the correct marks until you have made that particular passage without finding the bottom.

But rock crawling has its rewards, and these were fully evident when the *Pagan Prince* churned to a halt in the Quarantine anchorage off Puerto Madariago with the *Persian City* nowhere in sight. With her Yellow Jack at the fore, the *Pagan Prince* swung to her anchor, awaiting the advent of the Port Doctor to grant pratique.

"Half an hour gone already," complained Mr. Kellow. "Can't you do something about it?"

"I've tried voyage after voyage to get it into your thick skull that we are completely in the hands of the port authorities in these matters," said the captain crossly. "Your letter Number 65 was very intolerant about the whole matter. Now you can see for yourself. Ye'll just have to be patient."

"Patient! You suggest that I should sit here like a common person and see these foreign fools wasting my ship's valuable time with their *mañana* nonsense? Get a boat in the water—I'm going ashore. I'll soon shake things up. They seem to do just what they like with a mere skipper, but with me, the Owner, it will be different."

Captain Jimble gazed quizzically at the pompous little Owner, then nodded knowingly as something stirred in his memory.

"I'll get the mate to lower the jollyboat right away, Mr. Kellow. But you must have the Quarantine flag draped across the sternsheets, and keep the men in the boat. I'll go up and get the flag for you."

Puffing with indignation and self-importance, Mr. Kellow departed shorewards, bent on stirring up action, in which mission he was rather more successful than he expected.

Native jails are seldom salubrious establishments, and when—much to his astonishment—Samuel Kellow suddenly found himself incarcerated in a fruity specimen of their worst style, his rage at the captain's carelessness in putting the wrong colored flag in the boat turned to a murderous fury when his sharp little brain told him that it was all his own fault for telling the captain he was color blind.

The outraged Napoleon fulfilling the function of port medical officer spoke no English, and it is doubtful if it would have helped very much anyhow. They are a class notoriously touchy on matters affecting their authority and dignity, and the crime of landing unquarantined from an incoming vessel had made the journey from the boat to the calaboose one of the quickest Samuel Kellow could ever remember.

The happy lot of bailing out an imprisoned shipowner falls to few shipmasters, and one can scarcely blame Captain Jimble for making the most of the occasion.

"I hope you realize what ye've done," lectured the captain in tones of virtuous severity. "This might finally teach you not to interfere. It's the point that's come up all the thirty years I've sailed for you, dragging your disgusting marine jalopy around the seven seas. Ye'll now be pleased to hear that the *Persian City* has arrived, observed the Quarantine regulations in the proper manner, and gone to our berth whilst we are still without pratique, thanks to your meddlesome activities."

A new low in dejected shipowners was achieved that morning, and Captain Jimble's only regret, expressed fully and freely, was that he could not exhibit him in more populous shipping circles where the effect would have been more salutary. However, he had other matters to attend to, matters which by no means brought balm to the suffering soul of Samuel Kellow.

"A draft for £300?" he yelped. "W-what's that for?"

"Shifting boards," replied the captain smoothly. "Don't you know that a full grain cargo requires a complete rig of safety boards: fore and aft bulkheads, hatchway feeders and all the paraphernalia as laid down by International Regulations?"

"More blasted regulations—in a hole like this! Twenty or thirty tons of lumber—think of the cargo that shuts out! And the expense! Can't you get by with a simple fore and aft bulkhead made up from dunnage like you always do?"

"Without your fool interference, we might have done," snapped the captain severely. "Although I'll never make ye understand the criminal risk ye take with

the ship and her lives—even though a man of my experience knows just how to load the ship with fair safety without obeying regulations to the letter. Now, thanks to your nonsense, we can't get away with that. Ye've got the whole port up in arms and they'll be down on us like hawks. Everything will be scrutinized, so we'll simply have to rig out the ship with proper shifting boards. Otherwise we'll be kept off the berth, fined, hung drawn and quartered—the whole treatment. I should have thought ye'd had enough of that."

"B-but £300! That's enough to buy out the whole potty little lumber yard in this hole—it's enough for two ships!"

"I'm hoping ye're right," replied the captain enigmatically.

"Then let me tell you something, Captain Jeremiah Jimble, you incompetent old gasbag!" exploded the overwrought Owner in a final frenzy of distraction. "My letter Number 78 specifically instructs you at all times to have sufficient dunnage, stowage gear and shifting boards in the ship to handle any kind of cargo. You may shout as much as you like that that's only "window dressing" on my part. They're my instructions for any inspector to see. If you chose to be smart and get caught short, then by heavens, you can pay for it yourself!"

"Ye're an artful old shyster," commented the captain in surprisingly mild accents. "A double-dyed old twister of the first water. But on this occasion I'll do just as ye say. I'll pay for that lumber and take my chance on what I can get for it afterwards."

DOWN in the holds of the *Pagan Prince* all hands toiled in a job-and-finish effort to erect a full dress shifting board rig for the grain cargo. There was indeed no time in which to go sour over seeing the *Persian City* commence loading under the ancient elevator. Only the Owner was useless enough to have mind to spare for his woes.

"Four days will finish the *Persian City,*" he wailed. "The charterers have eight lay days for us—they can get us away without demurrage, but it's our next charter gone west."

Captain Jimble released a mouthful of six inch nails to say, "Shut up, you snivelling old nuisance, and pass up that shore." Mr. Kellow, sweating and groaning under the burden of a fourteen foot six-by-six timber was too lost in physical distress to reply.

Yet by daybreak the work was done, and Captain Jimble rubbed his hands gleefully. "Now we must get this job inspected and passed," he said as he sent ashore for the surveyor.

By the very nature of their work, surveyors are seldom pally. The sour, hatched-faced little Latin who turned up to examine the shifting board job after breakfast lived right up to type. But try though he might—and he obviously knew enough of the *Pagan Prince's* peccadilloes to try very hard—he could find no fault with the job.

"I'll be obliged if ye'll sign my certificate to that effect," beamed Captain Jimble. "Then for a little noggin. It's dusty work down there I'm afraid."

The grim little surveyor brightened a little at this suggestion, and the captain got busy. From a lifetime's experience in anointing the thirsty gullets of port officials the world over he knew to a nicety what was necessary in each particular case. A quick and expert appraisal of the one in hand led him to produce his beloved lubricant, the infamous onion and banana wine.

Mr. Kellow started and blanched at sight of it, but a commanding flip of the captain's hand behind his back signalled him to silence. He watched, frozen with dread anticipation as the little man first held the glass to the light, frowned, sniffed its contents, then sipped them cautiously. Mr. Kellow need not have worried. A beatific smile softened the harsh features of the surveyor, then he downed the draught at one gulp.

"More!" he demanded.

"Oh—there's something I meant to tell you," said the captain, promptly refilling the glass. "Captain Prebble on the *Persian City* would like his boards O. K.'d too. His underwriters are rather fussy for the record, like mine."

The surveyor seemed to be a man who learned life by trial and error and it was obvious from the alacrity with which he sped on his way to the *Persian City* that

he connected ambrosial liquids with shifting boards on that particular day.

"I'm no soothsayer," chuckled Captain Jimble as the little man disappeared. "But I would risk predicting that the *Persian City* ceases loading within half an hour."

Just that very thing happened. The steady hissing of the grain pouring from the chute suddenly died away, and with the aid of a pair of glasses Captain Prebble was observed departing hastily for the town.

"Again without the aid of a crystal ball, I predict that my very dear friend Captain Prebble will shortly pay me a visit," said Captain Jimble complacently.

Prognostication seemed to be the captain's strong point that morning.

"Shifting boards?" he repeated pleasantly when Captain Prebble entered his room an hour later. "Yes, we're completely rigged with them, aren't you?"

"Of course not, you skinny old humbug! You know this class of ship always gets away with a jury rig. We'd all be fired if we went to that expense, no matter what our Owners say in their letters to us!"

"Well, ye're a smart young feller—a very smart young feller," said Captain Jimble. "Suppose you tell me why you think I might be able to help you?"

"They—they sent me down here from the lumber yard. Told me you'd bought up the whole shooting match." It was obvious that, seeking favors, Captain Prebble was carefully blue-pencilling his speech.

"Yes, perhaps I was a bit out in my estimate of what I'd need. My judgment seems a bit out since our slight dispute with your ship on sailing. However, we might have to finish off with bagged stuff, then we'd have to lay a regulation platform across the bulk grain first. That takes a lot of wood. But there, I expect there'll be enough left for your job—only I won't know until we've finished loading. Then I'll do you the lot for, say, £400."

"Why—y-you skinny gutted old brigand!" bellowed the incensed Prebble. "It's robbery—rank robbery!"

"Please yourself," said Captain Jimble pleasantly. "But the sooner we get loaded the sooner you can have the lumber to fit you up—if you behave yourself."

It was an unanswerable situation, and Captain Prebble bowed to it miserably.

"She'll just be in nice time for that next charter," declared Captain Jimble to his Owner as they dropped the pilot off Puerto Madariago four days later and squared away on their course. "You see, Mr. Kellow," he added, "there's a good many things not touched upon in the examination for master, and a lot of things you will never understand in the office. I hope this has been an instructive voyage. Aren't you pleased now that you came along and saw for yourself how I take care of the Owner's interests?"

"Well, it's still no more than your duties call for," the Owner growled. "So don't go looking for that bonus you mentioned."

"Bonus? Oh—that's all right, Mr. Kellow. As I figure it, those shifting boards you made me have to my own account have left me $100 to windward. I think I'll be quite satisfied with that!"

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CARNIVAL AT

ILLUSTRATED BY
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The airedale reared, taking himself out of danger, and when he came down he slashed half a dozen times.

TOOMEY CREEK

AS LONG as I live I will never forget the shame of Toomey Creek, when, until Arnold Leary came in from the hills, no man dared pit his dog against Jake Larris' fighting dog.

Jake Larris came with the carnival, which set up in Gandley's pasture, and along with every other youngster from Toomey Creek I was there to help them set up. It seemed wonderful, but I know now that it was just a seamy little show whose sole purpose was to get as much money as it could.

It got the money all right, baiting our people much as we baited muskrat traps. John Gandley risked one dime on a wheel of fortune and won a fine Indian blanket, but of all the others who started to play, nobody won anything. The man running the wheel could make it stop on any number.

I've learned since that such men, and everybody else connected with such en-

By JIM KJELGAARD

terprises, called the Toomey Creekers "suckers." They were fools to throw their money away when not one in a hundred had even a faint hope of getting anything in return. The carnival people were not entirely correct because we did get something; we got fun and a sense of having been reckless.

Except at Jake Larris' tent.

Jake's tent was at the very end of the row. Jake, a florid-faced man with a mouth full of gold teeth, stood in front of it with his dog beside him. I cannot say that Jake looked mean, or vicious, or depraved, though obviously he was an outlander. He had been places, and seen and done things, which were as foreign to Toomey Creek as a gorilla is to the north pole.

His dog, a white pit bull with cropped ears and a pink muzzle, was something else. There were a lot of dogs in Toomey Creek and few of them were thoroughbreds. That made no difference as long as they were good dogs, which was all we had to have. It was easy to see that Jake's dog was a good one. Not that there was any particular way we could tell, but a dog always has its own special look. We liked Jake's pit bull.

Jake did card tricks and juggled bottles until he had a crowd around him, then he reached down to grasp his dog around the body and lift it up. Apparently the dog was used to that. Anyhow, he stayed where Jake put him.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Jake said, "you are the first people in these United States to witness the spectacle that will be presented for you!" He twisted the dog's ear and the dog didn't even wince. "I have here Champion Mohammed 3rd, the fighting dog of India and a personal gift to me from the Maharajah of Mysore. All who have sporting blood . . ."

Jake told all about his pit bull and the dogs it had killed in fights. I'm sure that nobody who listened to him knew whether or not it was really the fighting dog of India, but everybody seemed willing to take Jake's word. In glowing terms Jake described a dog fight. Then he said, that if anybody had a dog able to whip his, he would pay them one hundred dollars. Of course, if the challenging dog lost, Jake would pay nothing. All who wanted to see the dog fight could do so for fifty cents each. With that, the Toomey Creekers fell back.

They loved their dogs.

JAKE became insulting. He told the passers-by that they had no courage and no sporting blood, and I saw a couple of the men bristle. However, those who came to the carnival had their families with them, and their wives kept them calm. Their shame, their loss of prestige because Jake Larris dared say such things, was still very evident. Every man there owned one or more dogs and some of the dogs were very good fighters. But fighting the village dogs for fun and fighting Jake's pit bull to the death were very different. Our people just had no stomach for it. I think that several of the men would have liked to fight Jake, but none would let their dogs fight Champion Mohammed 3rd.

People drifted away. I stayed as long as I could, my mother had told me that I could spend only one night at the carnival, and I was among the last to leave. Jake had not yet promoted a dog fight. The next night my mother told me that I positively could not go back to the carnival.

I was very sorry for myself, and sat in my bedroom planning just how many nights I would spend at carnivals when I was a grown man and no longer had to take orders. About half past nine I was attracted by the sound of angry voices.

Bill Henry's tavern was just across the street from our house, and quite often men talked loudly there until the late hours of the night. This was something different, something special, and I went to my bedroom window.

I saw Jake Larris across the way with his white dog on a leash. Obviously he had also failed to promote a dog fight tonight, and just as obviously he had been sampling Bill Henry's wares. There were quite a few men gathered around him, but Jake's voice rose high.

"Yellow-bellied hicks! Afraid to let your dogs fight, huh?"

I could sense the anger of the men gathered around Jake and his dog, but above and beyond that I could sense their

shame. They could not honestly deny what Jake was saying because they had not let their dogs fight. I hugged the window, shivering with anticipation. There might not be a dog fight here, but sooner or later there was bound to be a man fight.

Then Arnold Leary drove his battered pickup truck down the street and stopped in front of the tavern.

Arnold was a big man, six feet in his socks, and his uncut hair hung down to his shoulders. But in spite of the way he lived, his home was back in the hills and he spent all his time chasing animals. He was a gentle and slow-thinking man. He kept a hunting dog, a huge and grizzled airdale which was afraid of nothing on earth, and I saw the dog in back of the truck. Jake Larris saw it too, and his voice rose to a high falsetto, an imitation of a woman's voice.

"Dear me! Another lap dog!"

"What?" Arnold said.

He sounded more puzzled than anything else. I think the whole thing might have ended right there if Jake Larris had not been out for blood.

"That airdale good for anything except scratching fleas?" he wanted to know.

Arnold was not unfriendly. "He's the only dog in the mountains able to corner and hold a bear."

"Dear me!" Jake was again mimicking. "He must be terrible!"

"He is when he gets going."

"I'll bet you fifty dollars," Jake was no longer mimicking, "that my dog can kill him."

Arnold said nothing, and I knew he could think of nothing to say. He was not stupid, but he was slow. Jake's suggestion simply had not penetrated. Arnold looked at the men around him, but nobody said anything. That was partly because they thought Arnold should make up his own mind and partly, I believe, because all of them wanted to see how good Champion Mohammed 3rd was. They knew Arnold's dog. Arnold turned to Jake Leary.

"No sense in starting a dog fight."

"You afraid too?"

"No, I'm not afraid."

"Your dog would run, huh?"

"He would not!"

"Prove that."

"I'll prove it."

And Arnold lifted his airedale out of the truck.

THE men formed a big ring in the street, with plenty of space in the center. Jake's dog moved two paces forward, pink mouth opened in a happy smile and one forefoot lifted like a pointing dog's. He knew all about what was coming now, and what was expected of him. Arnold's airedale knew no more about it than his master did.

He was not afraid, and he had fought everything from 'coons to bears, but this was something new and different. Always, when he had got into a fight with another dog, Arnold had stopped him. The airedale was more puzzled than pugnacious.

Jake's bull, in no hurry at all, started a slow forward walk. Still puzzled, but wary, the airedale kept his eyes on him. He knew that the bull was coming in to fight him, and he did not want to fight. The airedale looked worriedly at Arnold Leary, but Arnold just stood still. This time he did not intend to interfere. Then Champion Mohammed 3rd struck.

There was nothing slow or lazy about him when he came in, head low and striking for a front leg. But, even though the airedale had not wanted to fight, he proved now that he knew all the tricks of fighting. It was not for nothing that he had chased bobcats, bears, and everything else. When the bull struck at him he leaped sideways and landed out in the center of the ring.

The bull turned around, once more taking his time as he started after his enemy. The airedale was watchful now, and did not again glance at Arnold Leary. He knew that he would have to defend himself, and now that he had decided that much, he gave everything to it.

Champion Mohammed 3rd was not more than a yard away when he again went into action, changing from slow motion to swift and striking a second time at the airedale's front leg. The airedale reared, taking himself out of danger, and when he came down he slashed half a dozen times. I saw blood on the bull's snow-white hide.

Everything was almost weirdly silent. No man said a word. There were none of the growls, barks, and yelps, normally associated with a dog fight. The bull did nothing except try to catch his enemy. The airedale merely lifted his lip now and again, but there wasn't any noise.

They sparred for another five minutes, and though the bull did not score, Arnold's dog slashed him several more times. He was bleeding a lot, but he still made no outcry. Then the bull got his hold.

It was not the one he wanted, the airedale was too quick to let him get a leg, but he did get a mouth full of the airedale's soft flank. Champion Mohammed 3rd closed his eyes and hung on while the airedale slashed him unmercifully. It made no difference. The bull would neither cry out nor let go. He tightened his hold, obviously with the intention of chewing through the flank into the vital organs. It was there that Arnold's dog proved himself.

Until now his had been a slashing, wolf's fight, leaping in to strike and away again. But no dog that closes often with dangerous big game lives very long unless he can adapt himself to almost any situation. Dragging the bull with him, the airedale bent himself almost double and closed his jaws on Champion Mohammed's neck.

I doubt if he had the jaw strength of the bull, but he was strong enough. Overtaking a bobcat on the ground, that airedale could shake it to death as easily as a smaller terrier shakes a woodchuck. And now the fight had sound.

It was the bulldog's death rattle, a terrible, choked gasping that floated across the street and right up through my window. I couldn't shut it out, and to this day I can both hear that sound and see the bull wilt. He did not give up, and he went down unwillingly, but he went down.

Then Arnold Leary stepped forward, spoke to his dog, and the airedale let go. The bull sank to the ground, tried to get up, and lay still with only his head raised.

ARNOLD LEARY faced Jake Larris, and it was as though Arnold had come suddenly awake. He'd had plenty of time to think while the dogs fought, and though he hadn't known before, he did know now exactly what Jake represented and what he was. Jake looked back, and I thought of a snarling weasel.

"Now all you have to do," I heard Jake say, "is collect your fifty dollars."

He was welching and everybody knew it, but Arnold Leary only laughed. It was a cold, hard laugh, not at all like the friendly Arnold everybody knew.

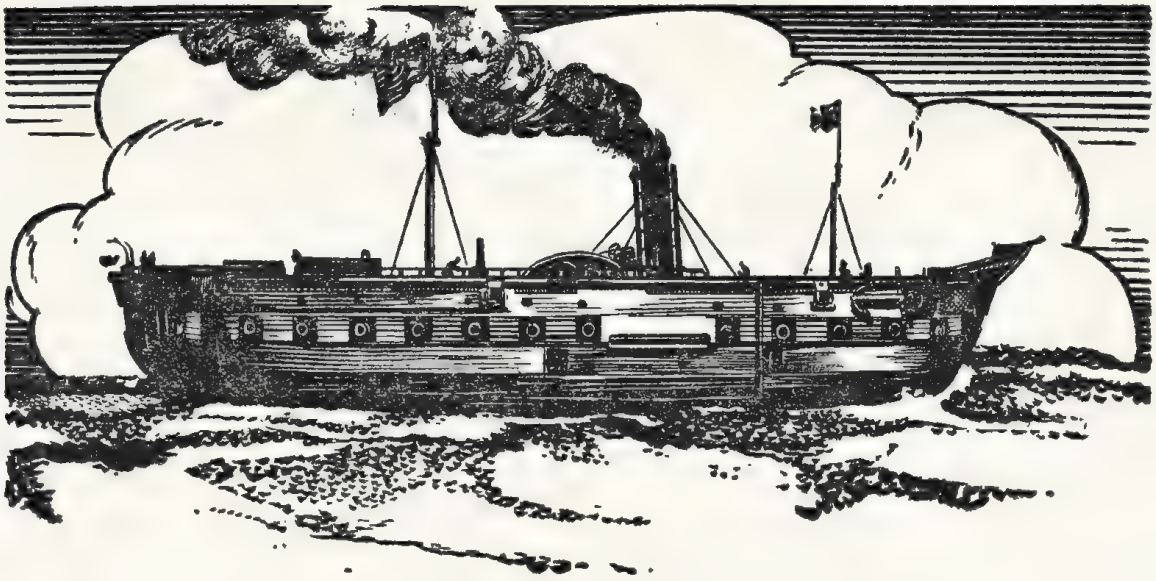
"I'm going to collect it," he said. "I aim to take it right out of your hide."

Arnold's first slap sent Jake staggering. For a minute he stood where he brought up, and when he started back towards Arnold he walked like a stalking panther. His clenched right hand was close to his side, and Arnold let him come even while he made ready to fight. Only Arnold had not expected a knife. Jake snicked it like a hornet's sting into Arnold's stomach.

I sat wide-eyed, watching the threatening, cursing men who laid hold of Jake Larris and manhandled him until Pete Terrill, our town constable, came to take him away. They helped Arnold into a car, and drove him to the doctor's. Only the dogs remained in an otherwise deserted street.

The bull struggled to his feet. He swayed, then seemed to regain some strength and was more steady. The airedale walked over to him.

They stood nose to nose, tails wagging as they became acquainted.



A FACT FEATURE By HARRY BOTSFORD

THE WARSHIP THAT NEVER FOUGHT

THE CITIZENS and merchants of New York City were admittedly scared. To the tune of $320,000 to be exact. The War of 1812 was in progress; Washington had been raided and the White House burned. The New York harbor area, a rich prize, was practically helpless if the enemy should descend upon it in force. The harbor needed a defense ship, the best the world had ever seen.

The hastily-formed Coast and Harbor Defense Association raised the money. Then they drove a hard bargain with a reluctant and jittery Congress. They proposed to hire Robert Fulton, the inventor, to construct a harbor defense ship, to be propelled by steam. If it functioned properly after exacting tests, the Coast and Harbor Defense Association felt that their investment should be refunded. Congress finally agreed.

Fulton's plans were ambitious. They called for a wooden ship 167 feet in length, with a beam of 56 feet, a depth of 13 feet. The ship would have twin hulls and it would be armored by 5 feet of seasoned oak. The ship would be armed with thirty 32-pound cannon, designed to shoot red-hot balls. The ship was to be called *Demologos* and it was to be driven by an engine of sensational power for the day—125 horsepower. In addition, the craft was to be equipped with pipes that would shower the enemy with hot water and live steam if the *Demologos* got close enough to use the new weapon effectively.

The English heard of the mystery ship. By the time the news reached them, it was strangely magnified and distorted. They heard that the ship was to be 300 feet in length, fitted with 13-foot armor and equipped with 100-pound cannon. The sides of the ship were to be fitted with 300 mechanically-operated cutlasses, making boarding impossible. British naval intelligence wanted particulars and staged a commando raid on Fulton's Long Island home, but the inventor escaped capture.

Fulton died before the *Demologos* was ready for its trial run in the New York harbor area. The craft's engines sped it through the water at the rate of 5½ miles an hour. The guns performed perfectly. But the test was not made until September of 1815, and the threat of a British invasion was past.

So perfectly did the warship perform that Congress paid for its cost. The *Demologos* was tied to the docks of the Brooklyn Navy Yard, where it served as a receiving ship for the Navy for several decades.

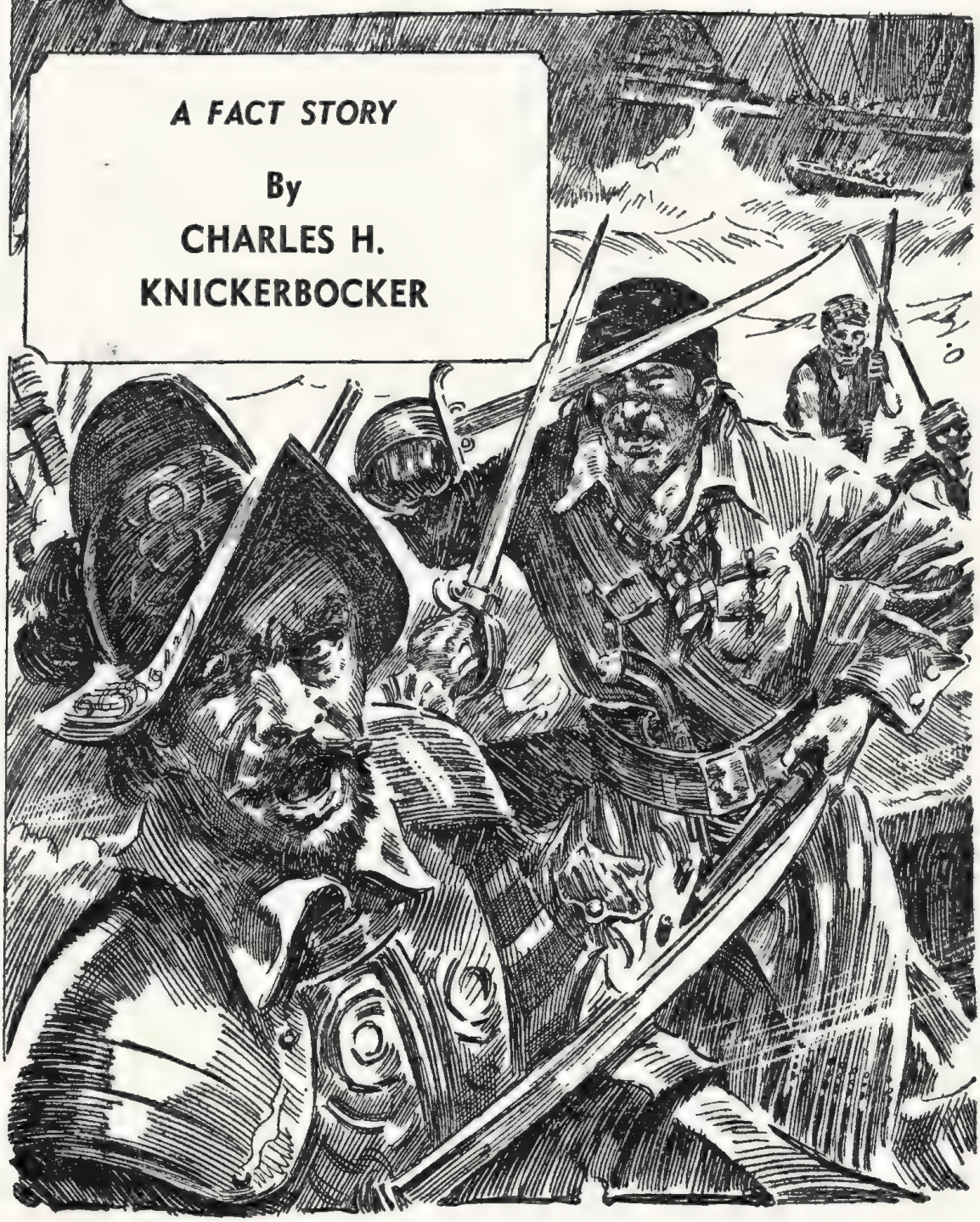
It was the first steam-powered warship of the United States.

DECORATION BY ROGER L. THOMAS

TIGER OF THE

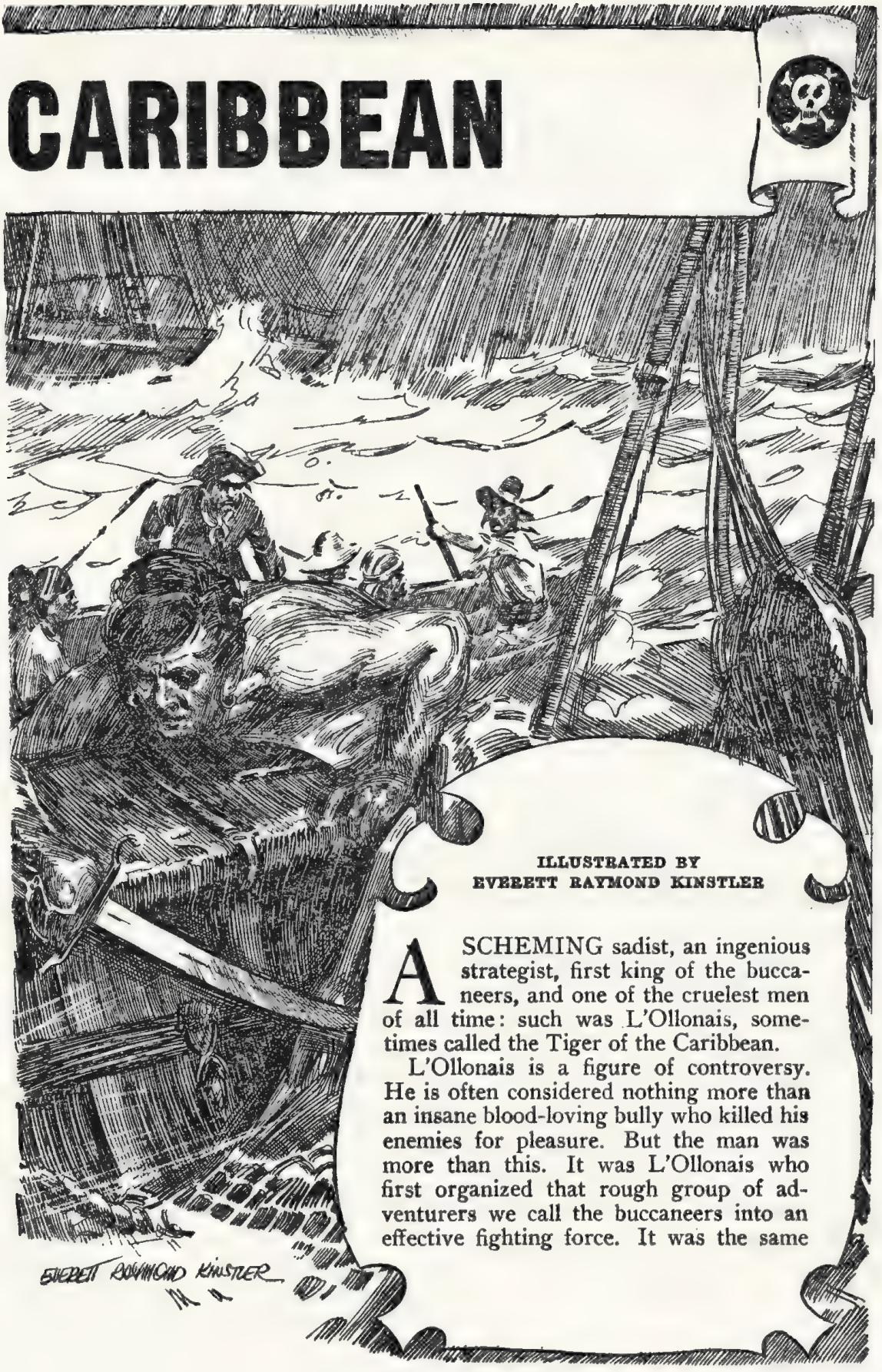
A FACT STORY

By
CHARLES H.
KNICKERBOCKER



Against heavy odds, L'Ollonais attacked the Spanish warship. . . . And towards dusk he made a surprise boarding.

CARIBBEAN



ILLUSTRATED BY
EVERETT RAYMOND KINSTLER

A SCHEMING sadist, an ingenious strategist, first king of the buccaneers, and one of the cruelest men of all time: such was L'Ollonais, sometimes called the Tiger of the Caribbean.

L'Ollonais is a figure of controversy. He is often considered nothing more than an insane blood-loving bully who killed his enemies for pleasure. But the man was more than this. It was L'Ollonais who first organized that rough group of adventurers we call the buccaneers into an effective fighting force. It was the same

Tiger of the Caribbean who struck the first heavy blow in the long battle which eventually drove Spain from this hemisphere.

In the late 1650's when L'Ollonais began his operations, the buccaneers were an unorganized group of discontented misfits. They were savage, fierce, and filthy men; refugees, runaway slaves, fortune-hunters, adventurers and raggletaggles from every corner of the globe. In the beginning, they were hunters, not pirates. They eked out an existence on the lonely keys of the West Indies by killing wild cattle and curing beef. This smoked salted beef was known as *boucan*—from whence the term buccaneer is derived. These hunters were an inoffensive agrarian folk until the Spaniards attacked them with characteristic brutality, seeking to enslave and exterminate them. A few buccaneers, notably Pierre Le Grand, Bartholomew Portuguez, Pierre Francois, and Rock Brasiliano, made small-scale counter operations, but it remained for L'Ollonais to organize these crude citizens into a really effective combination.

L'Ollonais was just a nickname. The man was christened Jean David Nau, a Frenchman born at Ollone. When but a youth, he was shanghaied and sent to the Caribbean as a forced worker for the French West India Company. At this time, he was trepanned—a section of his skull was crudely removed to mark him a slave for all time. Many succumbed to this brutal proceedure, but L'Ollonais was to survive more than this in his stormy career.

For a decade, L'Ollonais sweated and struggled in the steaming jungles of Haiti, beaten by inhuman overseers, tortured by stinging insects, periodically racked by tropical fevers. The life of a French Caribbean slave was not pleasant. It is little wonder that L'Ollonais bore no marked love for the human race. The slaves were given a small pittance and by scrupulous savings, it was possible to purchase freedom. L'Ollonais did so. Somewhere around 1655, he embarked for Tortuga, a freed man, to join the buccaneers. The little island of Tortuga had many times been wiped clean by Spanish raids, and the Governor was beginning to equip small ships to sail out in revenge. L'Ollonais served on a few of these. His courage and ingenuity so asserted itself that he was soon given a ship of his own.

L'Ollonais was a little man, small in stature, though not in heart. The hardships of slavery had left him a hunchback: stoop-shouldered, barrel-chested, with abnormally long arms and heavy shoulder musculature. He wore his jet black hair straight, parted in the center and falling to the shoulders like a girl's. His face was pinched and hard. A wisp of mustache decorated his upper lip. His thin hard cruel little mouth was set in a perpetual sneer. This was a weasel-like face: vicious, shrewd, and dangerous.

L'Ollonais made a quick name for himself as a daring hit-and-run raider. The Spaniards soon grew to know his name and fear it. But his career was almost nipped in the bud. L'Ollonais's cockleshell vessel was overtaken by a tropical hurricane off southeast Mexico and it swamped. The crew escaped to the shore, only to run upon a patrol of Spaniards. The Dons fell upon the water-soaked defenseless buccaneers, slaughtering all but a few in cold blood. L'Ollonais alone escaped death or imprisonment. He smeared himself with blood and sand, lay down among the bodies of his comrades, and passed for dead. When the Spaniards departed and the vultures had begun to arrive, he crept into the woods and bound up his wounds. L'Ollonais was able to enter the nearby town of Campeche, disguised as a slave. The trepanned defect in his skull made good his concealment. He found Campeche in the midst of a great celebration with bonfires, flares, and happy parties of rejoicing citizens. The Spaniards were celebrating the death of the dreaded Tiger of the Caribbean. L'Ollonais smiled grimly to himself and joined in the festivities of his own funeral. That night, with the help of a few slaves whom he took into his confidence, he stole a canoe and, after a long paddle over open water, reached Tortuga safely.

HE SOON obtained another ship and made a successful raid on a Spanish settlement in Cuba. Some of the survivors of this raid appealed to their Governor at Havana for help. The Spanish Governor

hardly believed L'Ollonais to be alive since word of the latter's supposed death at Campeche had been received, but he nevertheless sent out a ten-gun warship. Aboard the warship was a gigantic Negro who served as the Governor's personal hangman. The orders were to hang every buccaneer except the captain on the spot and to bring back L'Ollonais to Havana.

L'Ollonais got wind of the warship's approach. He hid his own vessel in a lagoon and, with his men, paddled two small canoes into the harbor off the village he had attacked. Towards dusk, the warship appeared on the horizon, cruised into the harbor and dropped anchor. The Spanish captain took L'Ollonais and his men for peaceful fishermen and asked them if they had seen anything of buccaneers. L'Ollonais blandly replied in Spanish that he had not.

In the night, the buccaneers crept up the anchor cable to board the warship, taking the enemy completely by surprise. The buccaneers seized the ship's cannon, swivelled them inwards, and opened fire on the startled Dons. The buccaneers were outnumbered four to one but they quickly drove the Spaniards to the shelter of the hold. L'Ollonais called down to the prisoners below—unless they came up quietly one by one he would blow up the ship. Then L'Ollonais stationed himself by the hatch and seized a cutlass, flexing his abnormally long right arm. As each Spanish head appeared above the combing, L'Ollonais hacked it off with a sure swift stroke. He reserved special treatment for the hangman—he strung him up from the yardarm. One fellow he spared, sending him back to Havana with the following message for the Governor: "I shall never henceforward give quarters. I have great hopes I shall execute on your own person the very same punishment I have done upon them you sent to take me. Thus have I retaliated the kindness you designed upon me and my companions."

The Tiger of the Caribbean never gave quarter to a Spaniard again. Previously he had been no more cruel than other buccaneers. But from this time on, he usually tore out the tongues of captives by the roots, put the poor devils to the rack and finally hanged them. The cruelty of L'Ollonais is not to be admired, but a few words must be said in his defense—he was not the worst. The great and famous Sir Henry Morgan, for example, once made a group of captured nuns put up scaling ladders on the walls of a town and thus receive molten lead and boiling oil on their heads. Yet Morgan was knighted and made deputy governor of Jamaica by England. Historians have been defending Morgan ever since, while L'Ollonais, who showed Morgan the way, is universally criticized. Actually, buccaneers were no more ruthless than their enemies. Ever since the landing of Columbus, the Dons had slaughtered every race they came in contact with: French, English or defenseless Indian. L'Ollonais and the others merely gave as good as they got. The Spaniards started it; the buccaneers finished it. In cruel times, cruelty was necessary for survival.

When L'Ollonais triumphantly sailed into the harbor of Tortuga in a captured man-of-war, he was the hero of the buccaneers. But, for L'Ollonais, this was only the beginning. He had conceived a project so bold as to be incredible in those days. He dreamed of leading a vast land and sea expedition against a substantial Spanish stronghold.

L'Ollonais mobilized the entire forces of Tortuga and set forth on the largest buccaneer voyage of the time—700 hundred men in ten ships. His destination was Maracaibo (now Livingstone, British Honduras) and Gibralter (now Izabel, Guatemala). The former was a large rich cattle town on the Gulf of Honduras, the latter a smaller but even wealthier trading center. Maracaibo guarded the mouth of a large shallow salt-water lake while Gibralter lay fifty miles inland at the other end of the lake. On the way, L'Ollonais took two big galleons with a vast treasure in cocoa, jewels, and pieces-of-eight. Morale was high after such an auspicious start.

The outer defenses of Maracaibo consisted of an earthenwork fort on a bar at the harbor mouth which mounted sixteen cannon. The army of Maracaibo was waiting for L'Ollonais at the fort. The rough buccaneers swarmed ashore, brandishing muskets and cutlasses, and took the fort after a bloody three-hour battle fought at cannon mouth. The next day

they set off for the town itself. It was only a six-mile sail but it took two days owing to adverse currents and a flat calm.

L'OLLONAIS expected another bitter skirmish at Maracaibo, but the city was deserted: the inhabitants had fled up the lake.

L'Ollonais captured a few of the fugitive inhabitants. By hacking one of these unfortunates to bits before the others, he persuaded them to guide him to Gibralter. So the buccaneer fleet started up the salt water lake.

In the meantime, things had not been quiet in Gibralter. The element of surprise was lost; there had been plenty of time for the citizens to prepare themselves. From nearby Merida, a professional soldier with European campaign experience was sent over with his well-trained army of four hundred men. There was an army of equal size in Gibralter so the combined force was twice as great as the depleted ranks of the buccaneers. A 20-gun battery was mounted at the harbor mouth. The only land approach to the town was completely blocked. A false entry was hacked through a marshy grove and guarded by another battery.

When L'Ollonais reached the head of the lake, it was obvious that the Spaniards were ready for him. L'Ollonais called a council of war. Many of the buccaneers wished to go home, but L'Ollonais was for attack.

The others reluctantly agreed.

"'Tis well," said L'Ollonais, grimly, "But know ye withal that the first man who shall show any fear, I will pistol him with my own hands."

The next morning at sunrise the buccaneers landed, each man being equipped with a cutlass, two pistols, and thirty charges of powder. L'Ollonais brandished his cutlass in his grotesquely long arm and shouted, "Come on, my brothers, follow me and be of good courage." The guides first led them along the usual route, but the barricade proved impassable. So they took the false path which had been made for them. This led through a mangrove swamp, a slimy foul morass. The buccaneers sank up to their hips in the fetid muck. Trees had been felled to impede their progress and to deprive them of cover. When the buccaneers were firmly mired, the hidden battery opened fire on them, shooting them down like fish in a barrel. L'Ollonais instantly perceived it to be a hopeless position. He decided to use an old stratagem, a false retreat.

The buccaneers made a pretense of throwing away their arms, scrambled out of the muck, and started to flee for the beach. The over-enthusiastic Spaniards left their battery to pursue. When the Dons in turn were floundering in the swamp, the buccaneers reversed and charged to attack with cutlasses. Somehow they were able to cut their way through and over the floundering Spaniards to reach the battery. They soon had control of the town.

The pirates had taken a beating—40 dead and 40 wounded, most of whom died of infection—but they had killed Spaniards in the ratio of ten to one, mostly in the slimy battle of the swamp. Gibralter was hardly worth the effort. Again the inhabitants had fled, this time leaving no food. The exhausted buccaneers stayed here for a month, pinched with famine, existing chiefly on the unsavory flesh of mules and donkeys. There was one advantage in Gibralter—some women stayed behind, a pleasure of which the buccaneers had long been denied.

On his departure, L'Ollonais managed to collect 10,000 pieces-of-eight from the fugitives in the woods as ransom against burning the town. Maracaibo had been re-inhabited by the time the fleet had sailed down the lake, and L'Ollonais extracted more ransom here—20,000 pieces-of-eight and five hundred head of cattle. Then, to the great relief of all concerned, the buccaneers sailed for home. The total loot of the expedition amounted to something like a quarter of a million dollars worth in coin and the same value in silks, jewels, and livestock. No buccaneer had ever seen such wealth; each man was a millionaire in Tortuga. Just as the fleet returned, there happened to be two wine ships lying in Tortuga harbor, whose contents were purchased immediately. For weeks Tortuga rang with intoxication and debauchery. When the revels were over, most of the buccaneers were as poor as before.

THE EXPEDITION merely whetted the appetite of L'Ollonais. With no difficulty, he rounded up another company of 700 men and set off for new adventure—his goal this time, Nicaragua.

In his previous voyage, L'Ollonais had the golden touch, but now his luck had turned. This time he ran into a series of misfortunes which eventually ended his career. The first calamity was adverse wind and weather which forced him into the Gulf of Honduras, a long way off course. L'Ollonais decided to take what came to hand, and he landed not too far from the scene of his previous success. Here, however, the coast was barren and poor and moreover well guarded. Three times in two days, the foot-sore buccaneers were ambushed by strong detachments of Dons. In this region, the Spaniards had fortified the highways with hedgerows of a dense, sharp-pointed thorn bush. They lay in ambush behind such hedgegrows. L'Ollonais countered with a specially-devised weapon—wadded balls of gunpowder, salt peter and tar called fireballs which were ignited and lobbed over the hedgerows. Thanks to the fireballs, the buccaneers won each skirmish but only after heavy loss.

After a few weeks of tedious brush-fighting, the buccaneers withdrew to the uninhabited coast of Yucatan to regain their strength. While here, a tremendous 42-gun Spanish warship stumbled on them. Against heavy odds, L'Ollonais attacked her. The warship beat off the attackers in a running bombardment of many hours but, towards dusk, when the air was black with powder smoke, L'Ollonais launched four canoes and was able to make a surprise boarding. L'Ollonais may have lost his touch on land but not at sea, for he took the warship easily with a handful of men. He had expected her to carry a good deal of treasure, but her cargo was disappointing—only a little iron and paper and a few crocks of wine.

This scanty profit after a desperate engagement stirred up discontent which had been brewing for some time. There was open revolt and most of the company sailed home, leaving L'Ollonais with a single ship.

L'Ollonais did not give up; he still had designs on Nicaragua. But his luck remained bad. While beating southeast around the bulge of Honduras, he stuck fast on a sandbar at Cape Gracios a Dios. Ironwork, supplies, fittings, and water-casks were jettisoned, but to no avail. The masts and riggings were cut to lighten ship, but there she stayed, stuck fast. There was only one thing to do if they were ever to escape: go ashore, break up the old vessel, and from the pieces build a smaller ship which could get over sandbars. This was done.

Without adequate tools, it was arduous back-breaking work. The region was bleak and desolate, inhabited only by hostile Indians. Food was low; the chief meat was monkeys which were both difficult to catch and unpalatable to eat.

After six months, the new boat was complete. It could only accommodate half the company, the other half being left behind on the unfriendly shore.

At last, L'Ollonais reached his destination; two terrible years after leaving Tortuga, he sailed into Nicaragua. He found the beach deserted there, and he landed. No sooner had his bedraggled, weakened little group entered the forest than they were surrounded by a group of Spaniards and Indians. Most of the company was slaughtered but, as usual, L'Ollonais escaped with a few others.

The Tiger of the Caribbean did not know the meaning of the word "defeat." He still planned to attack Nicaragua; he intended to pick up the other half of his company at Cape Gracios a Dios and to return to the attack. But first he decided to sail south to Panama for supplies. At the Isthmus of Panama, L'Ollonais and his men were ambushed for the final time, on this occasion by savage Darien Indians. For once, L'Ollonais was taken prisoner.

During his stormy career, L'Ollonais had tortured many captives to death. It was fitting that he should suffer the same fate himself. He was not intended to die in bed, or even to lie in an unmarked grave. The Indians tore off his fingers, toes, arms, and legs one by one, burned each dismembered part, and finally scattered the ashes to the winds. Not a trace was left of the mortal remains of L'Ollonais—Tiger of the Caribbean.

A horde of white-robed warriors charged with such fury that one bearded ruffian impaled himself on Jeff's bayonet.

THE BIG RUN

By PERRY ADAMS

THEY ran as if their lives depended on it. Their lives did.

Sweat spurted from them—some were blood-smeared. Under the red Frontier burn hard faces were pinched sober with the cruel killing they'd seen. Just after dawn, the Mullah of Ipi's merry madmen had pulled the string on the column—really pulled it.

Before another dawn of that broiling summer in the late 'Thirties, the Bombay wires would hum, and the *Times of India* would call this, if anyone at all survived "An orderly withdrawal, according to

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK KRAMER

plan." But to the party of thirty-odd—all that was left of "A" Company, Prince of Wales Light Infantry—it was escape. A rout, pure and simple. Beyond the eastern end of this never-ending valley, the Bannu road coiled out through the hills in a sweeping hook. If the boys were lucky—very, very lucky—somewhere in that hook they'd stumble on the tanks and armored cars of the supply train. And safety, or what passed for it here.

Back there in the nightmare confusion of ambush, a pack-mule had kicked big, redheaded Jeff Mace in the stomach. Jeff could stand the pain, which was bad; but now, an hour later, he still had not found his second wind.

No man could keep going like that, and beetle-browed Corporal Ennis watched, half sneering, as Jeff began to drop off the pace.

"Close up there," barked the corporal. "You, Mace, you such a washout you won't even run for your life?" Harry Ennis had not seen the mule kick Jeff and so did not know what ailed him. But the corporal was far from displeased over the new turn of events.

A MAN slapped a hand to his side and stumbled out of the pack, crimson bubbling thickly between clutching fingers. For an instant the rest checked their pace, grimly looking back. The wounded man went to his knees, retching, then slowly rolled over on his back. He was done. They picked up his precious rifle—on India's frontiers literally worth its weight in gold—and clattered away in a spatter of bullets. Even this brief half-pause had been costly. Their pursuers had gained ground.

Jeff Mace and Harry Ennis ran side by side, the corporal slowly dropping back with the big rifleman.

"Shoulda been you they plugged," Ennis growled. "If y'can't keep up, you know the answer, don'cher?"

He meant he would have to shoot Jeff, rather than leave him behind alive. There was a standing order about not letting these tribesmen take prisoners. Far better to be plugged clean and quick by one of your own than to writhe in agony, perhaps for days, under the torture knives of some fanatical Waziri, or his red-trousered wife. The ladies, up here, played rough.

The shadow of a smile twisted Jeff's white lips. That it should be Ennis who would finish him—Ennis of all people . . .

"Funny," Jeff mumbled. "Here you'll get a chance to do, all *pukkah* an' legal, what you've itched to do since school days. But you never could have wangled it, except like this. You aren't man enough, and you know it!"

The labored words took the very last of his breath. He had been running on will alone. All at once it wasn't enough. Gasping, he staggered to one of the shoulder-high boulders which studded the valley. Again the others paused, though the Waziris had drawn so close that their frenzied yells were plain to hear.

A rifle bolt clocked open. Clicked shut. Ennis, getting ready.

Everyone knew what the corporal was going to do. Jeff sprawled, standing, against the rock; slowly turned his head. And unless you had the soul of a louse, Jeff's fine, game smile caught fiercely at your throat and blurred your eyes.

A man said, "Aw, corporal for God's sake! Not Jeff Mace. Look—he's still on his feet. We can carry him along, somehow . . ."

Ennis shook his head. "It'd slow us to a walk. Got to think of the rest o'you blokes."

"But . . ."

"I'd be almost willin' t'take the chance," Ennis said righteously, "if we had more cartridges. But I bet there ain't a dozen rounds among the lot of us."

"We still got our bayonets," another man said.

Ennis snorted. "What good is bayonets—against hundreds? No. My duty's to save as many of you chaps as I can."

"Includin' yourself," someone flung at him.

"Who said that?" Ennis snarled. "Don'cher know orders in a case like this?"

They knew too well, but they also knew how they felt about young Jeff Mace. The Tommy who had first spoken, pushed forward.

"Get on, then, you blokes that wants to. I'll stick with Jeff. I'll finish him off."

"None of that tosh!" Ennis snapped. "Stand back—the lot of you."

He moved close to Jeff, raised his Lee-Enfield. The sights lined up on the center of Jeff's forehead. At last the eyes of the two men met. Jeff's clear, firmly resigned, almost serene, those of Harry Ennis muddy with dark triumph he suddenly knew was no triumph at all. For the one thing Ennis longed to see was a cringing Jeff. And there was not a trace of that.

Fury made the corporal's face doubly ugly. It was the same uncontrolled passion Jeff had often seen clear back to the days of their innumerable fights in the little schoolyard in Surrey. Jeff could recall his very first challenge of the school bully's sway—what a thundering licking Harry Ennis had given him! . . . Other scraps, Jeff slowly filling out, until he battled his tormentor on even terms . . . Mary Hazard, and Harry Ennis's almost insane jealousy . . . That night in the dark lane when Jeff, stalked from behind, had come within an ace of being beaten to death by someone unknown with a length of lead pipe. Jeff could never prove his slightly older rival did it, but he knew . . . The army then, for their town had always been a red-hot recruiting center for the Prince of Wales Light Infantry. Harry Ennis first in by a couple of years, and a corporal in India by the time Jeff was posted to the same battalion —as luck would have it, to the very same platoon.

"Get it over," Jeff said, watching Ennis's slack trigger finger. With that, the corporal's hand tightened on the small of his rifle butt.

"Listen," some one broke in. "Hold it, Corporal!"

Jeff heard the new sound, too. Ennis heard too. Jeff knew by the corporal's subtle change of expression. But far from lowering his rifle, he drew a fresh bead on Jeff's head.

In the brief fragment of time before Ennis fired, Jeff moved.

The bullet chipped rock beside his ear, sang crazily away. Jeff was half stunned by the point-blank charge.

"Just like I thought," snarled Ennis, quick to cover himself under the altered conditions which might well make killing Jeff unnecessary. "For all your fine airs, y'couldn't stand an' take it."

But he was looking skyward with the rest—sure sign that, having heard, he had shot at Jeff regardless.

BY NOW the morning air patrol was almost overhead. In this barren tangle of hills, there was seldom suitable terrain for advance landing strips. The R.A.F. made the long carry into tribal territory from the home base. Two ships broke formation to come roaring down into the valley. Jeff saw the on rushing Waziris stop—scatter like white ants under boiling water as the aerial gunners got to work. The ships buzzed the position, zoomed up, turned, and again sprayed the ground. With that, the pair wheeled again and went winging west to join the rest of the formation.

They had provided a fine breather, but only that. Already Jeff could see Waziris gingerly crawling from cover. And he realized something else, too. The pain in his stomach was slackening. He had been running steadily from the instant the mule kicked him, and apparently the one thing he had needed to get his second wind was this brief halt.

"I can run as good as ever now," he announced.

Ennis gaped. "Maybe, maybe not," he said sourly. "Well, get movin', then. But the first time you slow up again, I'll let you have it!"

A man sighed and crashed limp on his face, a widening hole just under the helmet line at the back of his neck. They picked up his rifle and were off again, the leading tribesmen not two hundred yards behind.

Higher now, the sun hung molten before them. It was like running toward the blinding, suffocating open door of a blast furnace. At the overnight halt there had been no chance to fill water bottles. Most were empty, or near it. Tongues were swollen and furred in brick-dry mouths.

The Waziris, who could run rings round their far more heavily equipped white enemies, closed the gap to about a hundred yards and hung there, now holding their fire. With every passing moment their purpose was clearer: They would

run the British to exhaustion and try to take them alive.

Now that he had his second wind, Jeff loped along, well within himself, for the pace had slowed to little more than a dog-trot. But some of the older men were faring badly. The chase was too long and Jeff could see they were nearing the end of their rope.

Ennis himself was tiring. "Another ten minutes'll do it," he jerked out. "Deep, narrow gorge comin'—remember on the way up? No sun in gorge."

Shade. The very thought of it lifted men's hearts. No one wanted to think, just then, of what lay east of the gorge—five miles more of open, sun-baked agony to the Bannu road!

In the laboring, ever-shifting pack, Jeff ran beside first this one, then that, paying scant attention. But now, turning sweat-crusted eyes, he found Harry Ennis again at his elbow. Briefly they ran slightly apart from the rest.

"You—you're in best shape of any," Ennis panted. "Maybe, if we make the gorge, I'll give you a chance to play noble."

"Meanin'?"

"First, how many rounds y'got left?"

"Precious few—maybe none."

"Everyone's pouches are empty. But your magazine?"

Jeff did not know. Through the ambush—right up to the time of that kick—he had fired as fast as he could work his bolt. Certainly he had no loose clips left—but what about the one in his rifle? He unslung the weapon, pressed back the safety catch and released the bolt, holding his thumb in the boltway to prevent a possible live round in the breech from being ejected and lost. A cartridge *did* slide from the breech, while in the clip were three more rounds.

Ennis watched closely. "Four, eh? Fine."

"For what?"

An inward smile just showed on Ennis's wet, grubby face. "One man rear-guard—that'll be you. Hold off them blokes from the gorge. Give your mates a chance t'get away. You'll be a bloomin' hero. It's V.C. stuff. Even if they have t'give the medal to your family."

"Never mind that guff about a V.C." Jeff said. "But the rest's fair enough—a good idea, even if it's a mighty convenient way to get rid of me!"

"Such talk," gasped the corporal piously. "You get the honor because you're the best man I got. That's what I'll tell the colonel, too!" It was a perfect setup and Ennis knew it.

For some time the flanks of the valley had been drawing together, while the floor sank deeper and deeper; and now sandy, boulder-strewn earth gave way to solid rock. It was the true beginning of the gorge. A few more steps, and the sun was lost behind narrow, frowning cliffs.

Ennis gave Jeff a meaning nudge. "Break off, matey. Make them four rounds count, mind. Ta-ta, hero!"

THEY had been running right at the rear of the detail, and so Jeff's move was unobserved. The rest of the party went clattering on, boots echoing along the vaultlike way. Jeff thought, as he fixed his bayonet: "I'll never see any of you again." At least, dying like this was better than being shot for a straggler by one of your own. There was purpose in this; it had some dignity—a soldier's end.

Near the gorge entrance a ribby rock buttress offered cover and a rest for his rifle. As the Waziris came on, he thought their numbers much less than before, but there was little time to ponder over a possible reason.

At fifty yards Jeff fired into the leading groups. A man fell. The rest were off the trail like lightning; only seconds later, the valley seemed swept of anything living. Then, with the unexpected suddenness of a clay pigeon shot from a trap, a green-turban show-off flipped from behind his rock and sprinted forward. Again Jeff let fly. The tribesman clutched his shoulder and staggered behind the nearest rock. That foolish sortie was followed by absolute immobility. Of course, it couldn't be expected to last.

Elated over holding them back for so long at the expense of only two rounds, Jeff ventured to glance back into the gorge. Would his crowd be out of sight?

He could scarcely believe what he saw. Instead of taking advantage of the situation, the entire party lay sprawled on the

ground, not fifty yards away! And then Jeff recalled a small spring, the water clear and cold, that he had drunk from when the column originally marched in, bent on capturing the Mullah of Ipi and trying him in Bannu High Court for murder, arson and a list of other crimes as long as your arm.

Sight of that spring, now, had obviously proved too much for the dog-weary men. With a sigh, Jeff resumed his vigil. Now they'd all be killed. What could Ennis have been thinking of? Perhaps Ennis had been overcome by thirst, too. Perhaps he'd lost control of his men. He was not immediately visible.

There was still no rush from the open ground west of the gorge. The minutes passed, but still nothing. Jeff ventured another look back of him. The first man he saw was Ennis, now on his feet. With fist and boot the corporal was vainly trying to stir the exhausted Tommies up and on. Jeff caught his eye—beckoned.

Without enthusiasm, Ennis at last edged toward him, hugging the side of the gorge, for part of his way was within the Waziri field of fire.

"They're just sittin' there behind rocks," Jeff murmured. "You can understand my two shots holding 'em up a minute or so, but not like this."

"Fat lot o' good it's done us," Ennis retorted, with a disgusted look at his tuckered men. "We could have had our drink and been most through the gorge by now. They won't move, the blighters!"

"There's something funny going on out there," Jeff said. "Only about half as many tribesmen are out there waiting as were chasing us a while back."

"How can you be sure?" Ennis asked.

"I saw, I tell you, before they took cover."

Ennis's eyes narrowed. "Not so good, maybe. There's a kind of by-pass round this gorge. Officers was talkin' about it on the way up. Them others could have split off, see, and sprinted on ahead."

"Just what do you mean?"

Ennis bit his lip. "That'd explain, too, why them blokes outside ain't in no hurry t'rush us."

"You think they—"

"If I'm right, they got us trapped. This end—and now the other."

BY now, the slim remnant of "A" Company's four platoons was beginning to sit up again and take notice. Curiously gray under his tan, Ennis ordered all hands to fix bayonets and made a quick check-up of ammunition. No one had more than two rounds; most had none. Four men with cartridges were sent along the gorge to keep watch at the first bend. Three others reinforced Jeff, who had a drink at last.

In the brilliant sunshine outside the gorge, the only moving object was a small, brown lizard on a nearby rock. The white men waited, waited—it seemed forever. At last, far ahead in the gorge, beyond the bend, there was a shot. Jeff saw the four men stationed there, beginning to fall back.

Like an evil nightmare, a horde of white-robed *ghazis* spurted round the bend and the four were swarmed under.

As if the shot had been a signal to those under cover outside, each rock to the west now gave up its warrior. A first wave charged the mouth of the gorge with such fury that one bearded ruffian blindly impaled himself on Jeff's bayonet without knowing how it happened. At another time, his anguished surprise as the steel bit through his chest might have been a noteworthy incident. Two of Jeff's mates were hacked down as he and the tribesman impaled on his bayonet went to earth. In a brief pause, Jeff got his bayonet clear and he and the remaining guard fell back to the main party, now stretched across the gorge, back to back. Barely had Jeff taken up his position with them when the full force of the tribal two-way squeeze bent and buckled the thin line. In that wild confusion, Jeff had a flash of Ennis's face as the corporal was swept past him. Jeff parried a spear with his bayonet and again saw Ennis, close and half turned from him.

A rifle butt whirled straight toward the corporal's head. Jeff's speedy lunge deflected the blow's full force. Even so, the toe of the butt cracked against Ennis's temple and he dropped. For a few seconds, then, that segment of the fight spun away.

Jeff half fell over a wounded Waziri. The man spit at him—hacked upward with

his long, curved *tulwar*. Jeff bayoneted him through the throat. Ennis, down not far away, moved feebly. Jeff made to grab him by the collar and drag him to a cleft in the rock. There, at least, no one could shoot or stab them from behind.

With his heavy burden Jeff had just reached the cleft when the rocky rubble at his feet gave way. As if a trap door had been sprung, the pair plunged into gravelly blackness. Jeff's back came against solid rock. With Ennis almost on top of him, he lay, gasping for air.

Close above and oddly muffled, the fight raged on. Shots, screams, groans, the clash of steel, the rush of feet. Jeff could feel the impact of those hidden feet.

Little by little the unholy din lessened. At last it stopped. Jeff's left foot, his whole leg, for that matter, felt icy cold. In the new stillness, a small but steady sound, a sort of gurgling noise, claimed his attention. Running water, of course. And his almost numb left leg lay in it; that explained *that*. This must be the spring, which rose above ground on the opposite side of the gorge. So what had happened? He had stepped on a thin shell of earth above the concealed spring-channel, where the action of the water had hollowed a partial undercut in the rock wall.

Ennis's breathing was labored. The air was foul and getting worse. In addition to Ennis's weight, something else pinned Jeff's outflung right hand. He felt along the object. It was nothing but his rifle. Seemingly the sandy rubble had filled in after them, for no chink gave light from above. That they had dropped thus from sight, doubtless accounted for the tribesmen having passed them by.

Inch by inch Jeff worked his rifle free of the silt which made any movement difficult. Finally, using the rifle as a lever, with tremendous effort he managed to pry himself free of Ennis. Then, by reversing position, Jeff got his body into the bed of the stream, where the earth slide had not penetrated. So cramped was the space that he was forced to sit in the frigid water. Jeff pulled Ennis clear, feet first, until the corporal's thick body lay along the bank or edge of this underground freshet.

In that unrelenting darkness—for Jeff found his matches too wet to light—he felt about until he had assembled his entrenching tool, head and helve. Rather than attack the mass of debris brought down slantingly with them, Jeff decided to work straight up from where he sat. The earth roof was some three or four inches above the button of his helmet. He dug away awkwardly; and when he could no longer reach far enough from a sitting position, he shifted to his knees and finally stood up.

Abruptly he realized that unless he broke through very soon, he might not reach the surface at all. His arms were leaden and he was so drowsy that he was fast losing the will to keep digging. He took a deep breath of the foul air and decided that he might be good for about twenty more strokes. But the first stroke after that had a different sound, and a few more blows opened a narrow aperture and brought life-giving oxygen.

IT was an easy matter to widen the hole to head size, and he took a cautious look about the gorge. The whole area near the spring was a bloody shambles. White man and brown lay in the grotesquely unstudied attitudes of violent death. The tribesmen often mutilated the bodies of dead enemies as well as those of live captives, but from what Jeff could see in that first look around, no mutilation was evident, beyond the wounds of combat. Had the Waziris taken any prisoners? Until a check of the bodies was made, this could not be answered.

Sick at heart, Jeff set about freeing Ennis and himself from the odd cave-in which had undoubtedly saved their lives—for the moment. The unconscious N.C.O. seemed to weigh a ton, but at length Jeff dragged him out.

For a bit, then, Jeff stood on rubbery legs, too done even to clean the mud from his rifle. It was while he debated what he should do about Ennis that he heard voices from the open end of the gorge. British voices? His hopes rose, but immediately he identified the speech as Pushtu. With grimy hands which trembled with haste, Jeff dragged Ennis back into the hole.

The speakers drew nearer. Jeff had not been long enough on the Frontier to

know much Pushtu, but from what he could make of the conversation, these men had returned in search of something. Or *someone?* Could it be for Ennis and himself?

The hole. If they looked at all carefully, they were bound to spot it. Jeff remembered the two remaining rounds in his rifle. But the barrel would be hopelessly plugged with mud and sand. A shot under such conditions *might* clear the barrel, though it would ruin the rifling, it could also produce a breach or barrel-blow which might blind or even kill him.

Jeff crouched helplessly beside the body of Ennis, the pair imperfectly concealed if anyone glanced directly in their direction. More with the idea of using his bayonet than of firing, except as a last resort, Jeff rested his rifle lightly against the lip of the hole.

The voices, apparently raised in argument, came closer and closer.

"There!" a man said suddenly.

"Yes, there it is," another added.

It *must* be the hole they were looking for. Well, they'd found it. Jeff tensed for a quick bayonet thrust, but still no one came into his restricted line of sight. Then, without apparent rhyme or reason, the tribesmen seemed to move off.

"It is a fine one—like new," Jeff heard a man say. A rifle bolt clicked.

So that was it—they had returned for a rifle! Somehow they had known that a precious Lee-Enfield had not been taken with the others from their dead foes. Jeff was well aware that these men would almost sell their souls for a British rifle—that they would check and recheck to make absolutely certain none had been overlooked.

When the sound of voices died away, Jeff climbed from the hole again, this time venturing to the mouth of the gorge. A long stretch of the back trail was visible. Only the pair who had returned for the rifle were in sight, but Jeff realized that many roving bands of Waziris must be in the vicinity. The morning ambush—followed by the newer minor success in the gorge—would encourage the hillmen to press an attack on British rolling stock along the Bannu road. By now, Jeff reasoned, there were doubtless hundred of warriors between his position and the supply train. Making contact with his own people would be a very tough proposition even were he alone and unhampered. With Ennis . . .

Here starkly and without forethought, came the bitterly acid test of another kind of courage. Moral courage. The kind of test many never face in their entire lives. Jeff moved back into the gorge, peered down at the head and shoulders of the man who once had deliberately tried to kill him in that darkened Surrey lane; who, young as this new day still was, had already nearly killed him again, then plotted to place him in a position of such jeopardy that it had been like a death warrant. A man, as Jeff saw it, without honor or decency or integrity.

What would Ennis do, Jeff mused, were their positions revered at this instant? Was there need to ask? With no one there to see, Ennis would kill him. Then, if Ennis won through to the train, he would appear to be the heroic sole survivor of this historic disaster, and the Victoria Cross he had glibly spoken of earlier, would surely be his.

It would be, from Ennis's viewpoint, an unbeatable situation.

Kill Ennis then, and move on fast! It was the only common sense thing to do, wasn't it? *Well, wasn't it?* Why, he could even report what he had done, and stand foursquare with orders!

Ennis stirred slightly. It was plain he was coming to. Jeff realized, for the first time, a fact that had been obvious all along. Ennis had no rifle. He had lost it, probably, at the moment of being knocked out. Perhaps his was the very rifle the Waziris had returned for. They would have seen it, possibly, kicked to one side and unobtainable in the heat of the fight.

Again Ennis moved. Kill him now, He'd never know what hit him.

"God help me, I can't," Jeff groaned.

But leave him here—unarmed? There was only one other course open—to try carrying him in. And that was plain suicide. Yet so it must be.

The thought of Ennis's lost rifle was an urgent reminder of that still plugged barrel in Jeff's own Lee-Enfield. He would take a precious minute or so, right now, for a quick cleaning job. He flicked open the butt-trap, reversed the gun so that

pull-through and oil can slid into his right hand. The pull-through, he saw, lacked its piece of cleaning flannel at the loop end. He would have substituted the steel-gauze, but the unit had been missing for some time. It was the work of a moment to tear a bit of flannel from the tail of his shirt. The stuff was still water-soaked from the stream, but he folded it, squirted oil on it, and, after "breaking" the shallow dirt plug at the muzzle end of the barrel with the brass pull-through weight, rapidly cleaned the barrel with a proper pull through from breech to muzzle.

THE long summer afternoon was at its height as Jeff stumbled through the eastern end of the gorge and let Ennis slide to earth. With the big N.C.O. on his back, each step of the carry had been worse than the one before. And this had been the easy part—those five miles of open country lay ahead! Jeff assured himself that there was no one about, then flung himself down near Ennis, eyes closed, muscles aching.

"Oh . . . my head," the corporal mumbled, touching his bruised forehead. "Wh-where are we? Where's everybody?"

Jeff told him. "I been praying you'd snap out of it," he added. "I carried you this far, but from here to the Bannu road . . ." he shrugged.

"My rifle," Ennis said with more energy.

"Lost," said Jeff.

"Or did you leave it there because of the weight?"

"You're a champion an' no mistake," Jeff said out of a full heart.

"We can't all be heroes," Ennis sneered.

Jeff let it go. "See if you can walk," he said.

Ennis did not move. "Y'mean, you figure to make the Bannu road in broad daylight?"

"The train won't wait after dark. They'd pull out for fear of ambush."

"Wrong, matey, they'll wait. Don'cher remember the dawn patrol? The R.A.F. seen us survivors of that mess this mornin'. They'd be bound to report what they seen."

"But the fight in the gorge, they . . ."

Ennis scratched his chin. "Didya see any more R.A.F. after the early flight?"

"No," Jeff admitted, "but I could have missed 'em, easy, if they came while the fight was on."

"Even if they did come," Ennis said thoughtfully, "the shadows in that gorge was too deep an' dark for our scrap t'be spotted from the air. The R.A.F. wouldn't have known we was about wiped out."

"Even if you're right, and the supply train waits, this is no spot for us to be in."

"There's plenty o' good cover all about," Ennis said. "We'll find some shady fold in the ground, or a *nullah,* an' lie doggo till dark. You could 'ave a fine kip for yourself, too."

Sleep! The suggestion sounded too good to be true. And it was, Jeff realized, with Ennis on the loose. The corporal, it was soon evident, was well able to walk again and after a brief search, they came upon a small, fairly deep ravine.

"We'll be safe in this here *nullah,*" said Ennis.

They made the customary search for snakes, then settled down.

"Stretch out," Ennis suggested. "Relax. I'll stand guard."

"I'll keep the rifle," Jeff said shortly. With the weapon between his knees, he braced himself against the side of the *nullah.*

Ennis watched him lazily, calculatingly.

The afternoon wore slowly on. More than once Jeff caught himself nodding over his rifle. There came a moment when, in utter exhaustion, his head fell forward —stayed there. It was dusk . . .

HE came to himself half stupidly. The rifle—had he felt it move in his hands? Still drugged with sleep, he tried to dismiss the idea. Perhaps it *had* shifted a little. What of it?

Then suddenly he was sharply awake. The rifle had been snatched from him. He lunged wildly after it—going from a sitting position to his knees. The *nullah* was sharp etched in brilliant moonlight—and Ennis stood there, menacing him with the fixed bayonet.

"Easy, matey. Don't try t'stand up, you hear?"

But still Jeff could scarcely get his mind around it. "What—what . . ."

"I hates your guts, Jeff Mace. A mealy-mouthed boy scout—that's what y'are—an' allus have been. Your skull was too thick, that time back home . . ."

"So it *was* you."

"But this time a bayonet through your throat . . ."

"It won't do you any good," Jeff said. "Look behind you. Tribesmen . . ."

The oldest trick in the world. But for a split second Ennis turned his head.

In a flash Jeff tackled him around the knees. Snarling, Ennis went to earth. The precious rifle was between them. Somehow, in the desperate struggle which followed, Ennis managed to get the rifle muzzle near Jeff's head.

He fired.

Instead of slumping down, as Ennis expected, Jeff wrested the weapon from the corporal and sprang to his feet.

"You've done it this time," Jeff panted. "Listen."

The sound of running feet was close. Before either man could move, heads appeared over the *nullah*. But not the turbaned heads of Waziris. Slouch hats. In the Indian army, that meant only one thing—Gurkhas. Then in the bright moonlight, a single helmet showed.

"Did you men fire that shot?" the British officer demanded.

All at once the *nullah* was crowded with the grand little fighting men of Nepal.

"Private Mace fired, sir," Ennis said.

"To attract attention? Quite all right," the officer nodded. "We're part of the advance guard—the whole Bannu Brigade's behind us." The lieutenant peered at their helmet-flashes. "Prince of Wales men, eh? Sorry to hear about the rough time you've had."

"We wasn't in enough force, sir," Ennis said. "But gettin' back to that shot, it wasn't fired for the reason y'think, sir."

"What?"

"Private Mace has been a bit balmy ever since this mornin' fight," Ennis went on. "He snatched my rifle an' tried to do me in just now. Like that, sir, without warnin'—"

"But the truth is just the opposite," Jeff broke in. "This is my rifle. The corporal tried to shoot *me*."

The youthful officer was understandably bewildered.

"But you're holding the rifle," he told Jeff. "That much, at least, seems to bear out the corporal's version."

"No, sir," Jeff insisted. "He took it from me, fired—then I got it back." It was the exact truth, but somehow it failed to carry conviction.

The officer shrugged. "Well, there's no time to argue now. I'll have to place you both under arrest—send you back to second-line transport for return to your depot in Bannu."

"But, sir—" Jeff began, smarting with the injustice of it.

"It should be simple to determine ownership of the rifle," the lieutenant cut in briskly. "All they'll have to do is check its serial number against your regimental lists. Right?"

"Not quite, this time, sir," Ennis spoke up. "The very day before we took the field, 'A' Company's rifles was turned in to Quartermaster's stores, so's the armorer could make his yearly detailed inspection. The rifles was reissued in a big rush—any rifle to any man. The serial numbers don't mean a thing."

Jeff had almost forgotten the fact, but as the officer glanced at him for confirmation, he was forced to nod his head in agreement.

"Well, it's quite a muddle," the officer said. "Trying to steal another soldier's rifle on active service—shooting at him—either charge could be enough for the extreme penalty. I hope I'm not unfair, yet I'm bound to admit that on the slim evidence so far presented, my story before a court martial would favor the corporal."

Jeff had a sudden feeling amounting to conviction that unless he could produce some completely new evidence here and now, Ennis would come out top dog.

"I—I've got it," he cried, in a high, cracked voice. Proof that the rifle was his—positive proof.

"What do you mean?" the officer demanded with obvious impatience.

"If this is the corporal's rifle," said Jeff, "ask him to describe what he has in the butt-trap."

Unconscious in the gorge when Jeff

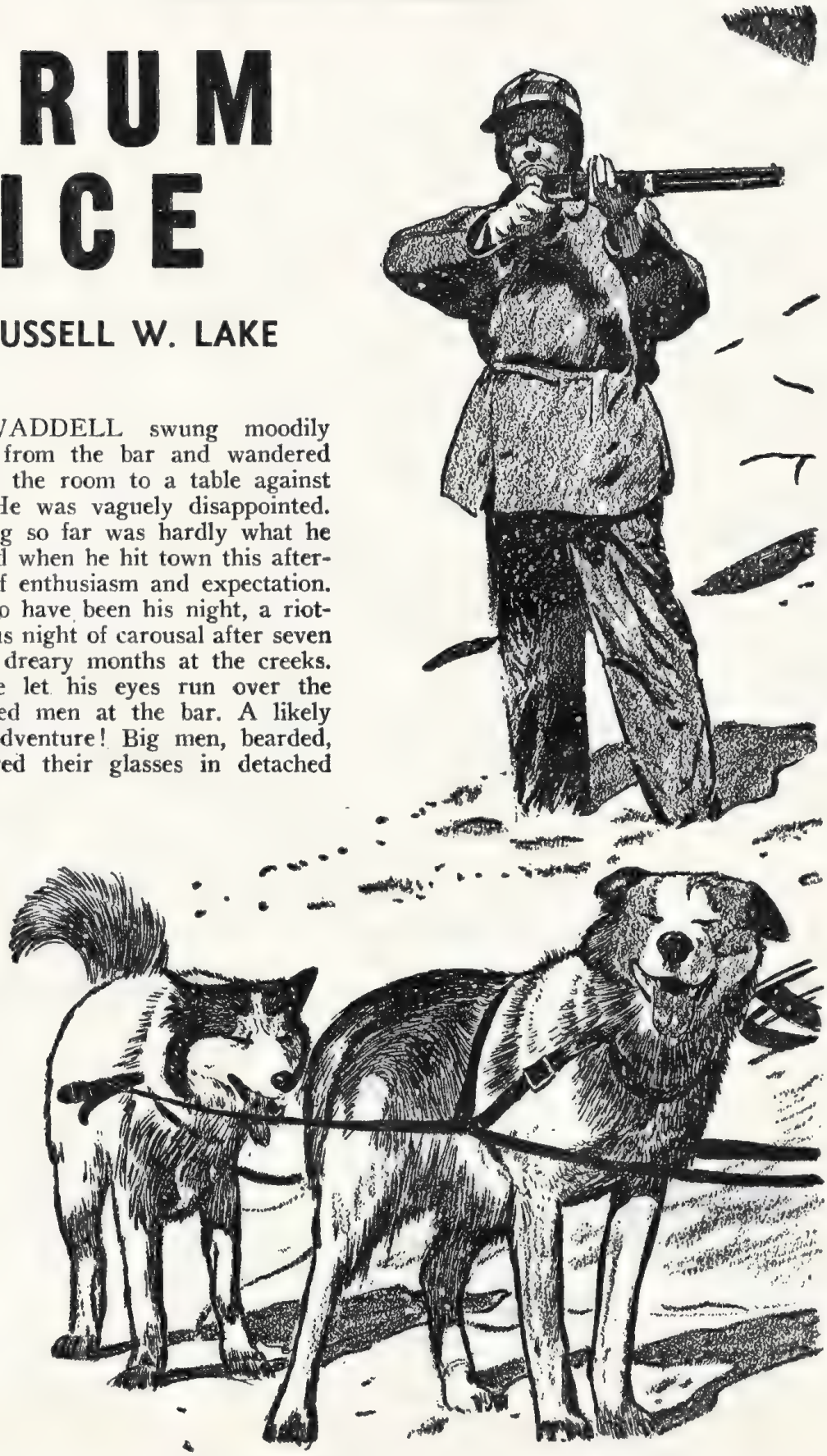
(Continued on page 130)

ILLUSTRATED BY EARL EUGENE MAYAN

DRUM ICE

By RUSSELL W. LAKE

JIM WADDELL swung moodily away from the bar and wandered across the room to a table against the wall. He was vaguely disappointed. The evening so far was hardly what he had planned when he hit town this afternoon full of enthusiasm and expectation. This was to have been his night, a riotous, glorious night of carousal after seven lonely and dreary months at the creeks. Instead—he let his eyes run over the rough-garbed men at the bar. A likely crew for adventure! Big men, bearded, they fingered their glasses in detached



"Here it is," Jim said. "I guess I can't argue with a gun."

melancholy or argued with dogged earnestness over some trivial issue that didn't matter anyway.

He shrugged. What was the matter with him? What did he expect? After all, this is the way things are. Men squabbling mightily about little things, enormously concerned over who is going to pay for the next drink, painfully eager for someone to listen to dull accounts of the trail. Tuned too low for high revelry.

He drifted toward the back of the room. Maybe a little poker might salvage the evening, if there was any help for it at all. As he passed the bar a hulking man in a red stocking cap lurched back drunkenly and brushed against him. The man's head snapped up in quick belligerence and then he turned away muttering. That fellow—Johannson, they had called him—had been getting on Jim's nerves with his drunken blustering. Let a man drink, but also let him control his liquor—or else go home. Johannson was like an unsteady bull pawing the earth and bellowing to scare the world.

A desultory three-handed game was in progress at a back table. A pallid man with a hacking cough was dealing and the other two were nondescript hangers-on who could be counted on to drop out if the stakes ran high.

Jim lost steadily, a little at a time. Even his losses were not exciting. Johannson was ranging aimlessly, putting his feet down like a landlubber on ship in a high sea. He came to a halt beside the table and watched the play for a hand or two and then settled heavily into a chair, demanding chips.

Johannson slowed up the hands even more. He had difficulty seeing, holding the cards at varying distances from his face and closing one eye in lugubrious earnestness.

Jim held two aces and a ten and drew two cards. Those two cards filled his hand and he felt his first flicker of excitement. He raised and two players immediately passed. The coughing man dropped out on the next. Johannson screwed up his face comically and pored over the closely-held cards in his hand. He raised. After two more rounds Johannson pushed all his remaining chips to the center of the table. Jim added an equal amount.

"Queens full," Johannson gloated, reaching for the pile.

"Aces full," Jim grinned. "Too bad you didn't have more chips."

Johannson stared dully at Jim's cards spread out. Then his face grew purple and he heaved himself up.

"You can't do that to me!" he roared, swaying over the table. "I know when I'm cold-decked. Gimme them chips!"

"Sit down," Jim said in disgust. "Before you fall down."

"I ain't drunk. I ain't so drunk I don't know when I been rimmed!"

Jim stood up. "Cash me in," he said to the dealer. "This game's no good when you have to play with drunks."

He moved to the bar. He heard Johannson's unsteady steps behind him and turned in time to duck a clumsy roundhouse swing. He rammed his elbow into Johannson's belly and walked toward the other end of the bar. "Go sit down and sleep it off," he growled.

Johannson swayed stupidly, clutching his abdomen. Jim found an empty spot and settled against the bar.

"This," he said, addressing the bartender, "has turned out to be one hell of an evening."

Johannson came to life then and charged toward him, grabbing a bottle from a table on the way. He thrust his snarling face close to Jim's. "Fight like a man!" he bellowed.

Jim put the flat of his hand against Johannson's face and pushed. "I told you to leave me alone."

The man fell backward and stumbled over a chair, which splintered under him. He did not get up. A thick silence spread over the room and settled. Jim bent over Johannson whose face was twisted in pain. After a moment Jim stood up.

"Better get the doc, somebody," he said. "First time I ever busted a man's leg by pushing him."

HE WENT out into the cold night air. Alaska City went to bed early. A light peeped from the hotel far down the street like a solitary star. He hunched deeper into his collar and plodded toward it, snow crunching in whining protest at every step.

An hour after he went to bed a knock at his door awakened him. He lighted a lamp and pulled on his pants. "Come in," he said.

A little, shrunken man entered and sat on the edge of a straightbacked chair.

"I'm the Postmaster," he said.

"Special Delivery?" Jim grinned.

"Want a job?"

"Not so you'd notice it. Why?"

"I need a mail carrier. Regular man busted his leg tonight."

Jim regarded him warily. "Couldn't be the gazabo that got mixed up with a chair at the saloon?"

"The same. Damn him."

"I suppose you know I pushed him in the face?"

"Yes."

"Why did you come to me?"

"I need a mail carrier. Thought maybe you'd take the job."

"A job," Jim said carefully, "is the last thing in the world I'm looking for. I'm going all right at the diggings and I came into town to have myself a time. The same which I intend to have. You'll have to get somebody else to carry your mail."

"I'd pay regular wages."

"That's no inducement. I've got a pokeful of dust in my pocket and some more cached away for when I need it. And more where that came from. Not bragging, just telling you. And, anyway, a job I'd take would have to be a lot more exciting than lugging around a bunch of penny postcards. Plugging along behind a dog team from one camp to the next and then trotting back home to wait for another load. That's not my idea of a thrilling pastime."

"We lost two men last year," the little man said. "One got mixed up in a storm and froze to death. The other was rubbed out in a hold up."

"When I get so old I'm no good for anything else, maybe I'll crawl around asking for the job. Why don't you get some old codger from the saloon, or maybe a good strong woman to carry your mail?"

The Postmaster lowered his head and contemplated his misshapen foot and shriveled leg. "I'd take it myself, if it wasn't for that," he said quietly. "But it's a man's job. A seven hundred mile trip north of here and some of it's rough country."

Jim nodded to the door. "Thanks, anyway," he said.

The other kept his chair. His mild blue eyes were fixed on the bedpost. "Johannson's a good man," he murmured. "Peaceable as a wooden Indian, except when he's drunk. Mighty good musher on the trail." He twisted around and looked up at Jim. "I guess I was wrong. I thought that because you were present, and active, when he busted his leg, maybe you'd think it sort of your duty to make the trip."

"No!" Jim yanked the door open.

The Postmaster limped out. He paused in the doorway. "Stop in and see me in the morning."

Jim closed the door hard and remained staring at it. "I'm not seeing anybody," he muttered. "Let him get somebody else."

The next morning he walked firmly past the Post Office on his way to breakfast at Joe's. It still was early and he had the whole long day to kill before evening. There is nothing, he thought, so dull as a little town in daylight. He dawdled over the ham and eggs. The ham reminded him of Johannson's red face and the way it looked all twisted with pain. The sucker just couldn't hold his liquor, that's all.

He sat with his third cup of Joe's locally famous coffee and looked out the window at the dirty snow in the street. Months of waiting—for this. Not even a hangover after his first night in town, and he had planned such a terrific spree! It was to have lasted for days. Maybe he still had a chance; things might brighten up a little tonight. But he knew they wouldn't. So far as the excitement Alaska City had provided or would provide, he might as well have stayed up at the creeks and read the Sears Roebuck catalog. He yawned. A movement outside caught his glance. It was the little Postmaster hobbling past and Jim's eyes followed him thoughtfully and a little enviously. There was a man who had a job to do to give him an interest in life—even if it wasn't a very exciting one. A fellow has to have something.

THE JAIL and hospital were one and the same. It was an arrangement of convenience; most of those who violated the law to the extent of requiring incarceration also by that time were in need of medical attention. Of the six beds in the room only one was occupied. Johannson was sitting up with his white-cased leg elevated stiffly upon pillows. A girl with straw colored hair sat slim and straight with her back to the door when Jim came in.

"Hello, Johannson," Jim said. "How's the leg?"

Johannson grimaced. "I can feel it's still there. Waddell—you are Waddell, ain't you? Well, this is my daughter, Mary."

Jim inclined his head. She nodded curtly.

"Mary, where's your manners?" Johannson chided. "Get Mr. Waddell a chair."

Jim hastily brought up a chair and sat down.

"I'm sorry your leg's broken," he said. "Guess I was a little rough."

"You'd think you two were bosom friends," Mary observed.

"Mary, hush!" Johannson ordered. "It wasn't Mr. Waddell's fault nohow. I made a nuisance of myself and got what I deserved." He grinned wryly. "I was celebratin' my last night in town before that long trip and I just celebrated too hard."

"The old man asked me to make the trip for you."

Johannson brightened. "Are you?"

"Why should I?"

"I guess so," Johannson shrugged. "It don't mean nothin' to you. No reason you should."

"No reason at all," Mary broke in swiftly. "It means nothing to him that those people up there have been waiting three months and still won't get their mail. It means nothing—"

"Mary!"

"I will not hush! I get tired of these young fellows who swagger around making a lot of noise but are afraid to follow a trail you make four or five times a year in all kinds of weather. He just breaks your leg, that's all, and says 'Why should I?' The mail is supposed to go through on schedule but there isn't a man in town except you, Dad, who has the nerve. I wish there was one of them who would do something fine in his life—just once! Every mail is like Christmas to the poor people in those camps but there will be no Santa Claus this trip, because Santa broke his leg! Oh, I get so sick of these brave young men! I wish you'd let me go myself."

Jim regarded her flushed face quizzically. He looked into eyes as blue, as clear, as cold as a Norwegian fjord. His glance fell on her lips, full and inviting although now curled unpleasantly.

"I'm not afraid," he said.

"Then prove it!"

He stood looking down at her. "Little girls," he said, "should hush their mouths."

As he left them he heard a gasp, followed by Johannson's deep voiced chuckles.

He stood for a while in the outer office, meditatively smoking a cigarette, before he went down the street. At the Post Office he paused with his eyes on the saloon where men already had begun to congregate. Abruptly he turned in.

"Well," he said, "here I am."

The Postmaster chuckled. "Thought I could count on you."

"No matter how boring this trip will be," Jim said, "it can't be as bad as staying another night in this town. At least the dogs won't tell me about the time they washed their underpants up on the Yukon and it froze so hard they had to walk straight up for three weeks. That's the kind of stuff I heard last night."

In two hours the big sled was loaded and the mail bags lashed down. Thirteen dogs were harnessed two abreast except for the leader, a huge gray malemute sitting calmly on his haunches quite undisturbed by the clamor behind him.

The Postmaster came out with a bulky envelope. "I'm a little worried about this letter," he said. "It's for John Price—your last stop. Looks important. Take good care of it." He thrust it down into one of the bags.

"You've got a hard trip ahead of you," he went on. "Johannson has been over that route more than a dozen times and he has

never made it in less than eighteen days."

"I'll better it," Jim said. "If these hounds have an ounce of guts we'll make it in fourteen. Anything for a little excitement."

The Postmaster smiled.

Mary Johannson came from the hospital. "Dad said I should thank you for what you're doing," she said, her eyes averted.

"He's welcome."

"He said you can trust Foxy, the lead-dog. He's got more trail sense than most men." She spoke in a monotone as though repeating word for word. "Watch out for Boner. That's the first swing dog on the right. He will pull the whole load, if you ask him to, but he's a devil. They're all vicious, but Boner is the worst. Be careful of the dogs. Be careful of the river—watch for overflows. Be careful all the way."

"Thanks."

She came a little closer and looked up at him. Her eyes were as blue, as clear, but not so cold as he had last seen them. "You told me to hush my mouth," she said impulsively, "but I'd like to add one thing more. I've been speaking for Dad, now I want to speak for myself. I think this is a wonderful thing you're doing. I take back everything I said in there."

He looked down at her, meeting her level gaze. "When I come back, I'm going to ask you to say that again."

HE GAVE the command to the dogs and they lurched into the harness. The sled glided down the street, the dogs leaping and yelping, and shortly slid out on the river where the ice was smooth. The dogs were fresh and eager to run.

The air was clear and comparatively warm. They made good time that day and camped before dark twenty-five miles down the river. He moved warily among the dogs. He knew enough about the rangy malemutes to keep on his feet while near them. Malemutes are powerful and willing but treacherous. Lighter than huskies, they pack down the trail in heavy going where another dog might break through. But an old musher who had many a scar from slashing fangs had said: "No matter how long you work with a team o' malemutes, or how loyal they are, just keep on your feet among 'em. If you slip and fall, yell for all you're worth and get up quick, swinging whatever you got in your hand. They'll rip you wide open first, and think about it afterward."

The wind was rising and growing colder. By morning the temperature had skidded from 10 below to 30 below. Snow crackled underfoot. There was the smell of storm in the air. "Looks like we're in for a norther," he muttered. "Probably tomorrow. We'll find a trapper's cabin and hole up."

They moved out on the river and bent into the wind. The dogs sensed the need for speed and pulled the heavy load steadily and fast. Jim trotted behind gripping the handlebars. The sled had a tendency to skid on the ridgy ice.

At noon the first flakes came. Hard driven by the wind they shot past like bullets or bit at his face. He had seen no trapper's cabins in which to find refuge. The stunted trees along the river offered little protection. There was nothing to do but keep on.

In an hour he was immersed in a fluid world of white. He could see only the last four of his thirteen dogs, the others were veiled in the swirling blizzard. A woolen muffler covered most of his face but the hard flakes picked at the skin around his eyes like needles. The dogs had slowed to a walk, noses almost touching the ice.

"Johannson would know a dozen places to stop," he grumbled. "He wouldn't have to travel in this."

At length he pulled off the river and made camp. The loaded sled offered but slight protection and with difficulty he built a small fire. His hands became numb after a few seconds without mittens. The dogs wolfed their food and immediately dug in, burying themselves completely in the snow. Jim got into his sleeping bag and pulled blankets and a tarpaulin over him.

It was hardly comfortable but he was tempted to wait out the storm. Except there was no telling how long it would last and he had only enough food to last until his first mail stop, a trading post on the Upper Childress. In the morning he

dug himself out from under three feet of drifts and rooted around until he located all the dogs. Snow was falling heavily but the wind seemed to have lessened a little.

All day Jim tramped ahead of the team and when he stopped that night exhausted, he estimated he had made only fifteen miles. In the next three days he traveled forty-five miles, fighting the storm for every inch of it. He could not see ten feet ahead of him and at times during heavy gusts he could see nothing at all except the swirling of white.

The fourth morning he ate the last of the grub. Although he calculated he was two days behind schedule, he ought to reach Martin's post today. He checked again the rough map the Postmaster had given him.

During the morning the wind began to die down and snow whirled about him less furiously. At times he could see stunted trees along the river bank. By noon the blizzard had ceased altogther and he moved through a clear, beautiful world of pure whiteness. Rolling hills swept away on both sides.

The wind was gone and in contrast the silence was cold and oppressive. The temperature had slipped to forty below. The only sound was the padding of the dogs feet and the creaking of the sled.

All day he watched for the trading post but darkness found him still breaking trail ahead of the tired team. It could not be much farther. The danger now was that he would pass it by and he constantly peered into the darkness for a gleam of light.

For hours he plodded on, the conviction growing that somehow he had missed the settlement. All his grub was gone as well as that for the dogs.

It was nearly midnight when Foxy swung off to the left. Jim resisted the impulse to call him back and instead walked ahead of the team in this new direction. They went up the bank and across a windswept flat. The dogs were eager and clamorous. Then he saw the dark bulk of buildings. A light went on.

He pulled up in front and began unhitching the team. A man came out with a lantern.

"Ho, Foxy!" the man cried. "Johannson, you old son-off-a-gun! Here, I'll give you a hand with the dogs. Hey, Mabel, put on the coffee! Johannson's here!"

Jim was too tired and cold to correct him. They tied the malemutes behind the cabin and Martin fed them.

As they walked around to the front, Martin held the lantern high. "Hey, you ain't Johannson! Thought you acted different."

"No. He broke his leg. I'm taking his place."

The next morning he started northward again, his food supply replenished. The day was clear and still with the temperature hanging at forty below. The dog's breath formed small clouds above their heads.

HE MADE the next trading post in two days. Three days more and he reached the third. The pace was beginning to tell. It was increasingly difficult to drag himself out in the mornings and the last few hours of the day were unbelievably long.

From here it was two hundred miles to the little mining town of Holy Cow, so named from the excited ejaculation of the man who first discovered gold there. That was his biggest stop. It lay on the Katzak River, one hundred and fifty miles east across country. This, the Postmaster had warned him blandly, was just about his only chance of getting lost. He would have to rely on the uncanny trail sense of Foxy, the big lead-dog.

Late in the morning they came into heavy fog on the river and Foxy slowed down. In spite of Jim's urging the entire team refused to move faster than a slow walk. They minced along as though on tender feet.

At last Foxy stopped altogether and deliberately sat on his haunches. No amount of shouting or cursing would make him budge. Finally Jim strode forward and seized Foxy's collar, dragging him bodily ahead. As soon as Jim released him, Foxy sat down. Jim pulled him roughly again.

Before he realized what was happening he was standing ankle-deep in slush. He jerked back, hauling the dogs with him, but not before he and the first three dogs had soaking feet. It was an over-

flow. The thick ice had cracked, allowing water to seep out and spread under the snow covering. Foxy had smelled the water at least a hundred feet away.

Overflows had caused the horrible agony of frozen and gangrenous feet for many an Alaskan musher. Jim hastily pulled over to the bank and built a fire. Even so, his socks were stiff as boards before he could get them changed, and his feet half frozen. Then he spent an hour cleaning needle-sharp ice crystals from the dog's paws. From then on he looked with even greater respect on the trailwise Foxy.

After ten miles they came out of the foggy area and the dogs spurted ahead without urging. Jim made camp that night on a bleak flat beside the river and resumed travel early the next morning. He was racing against time now—Johannson's time.

He kept a sharp lookout for the abandoned cabin described by the Postmaster. That was the turn-off point.

They reached it an hour before noon and the dogs readily swung off the river and headed eastward. Snow had covered every vestige of a previous trail but Foxy proceeded without hesitation. Throughout the entire distance to Holy Cow he thrust his nose beneath the surface at intervals and sniffed.

Before they camped that night the dogs were leaving a painful trail of blood. Sharp spikes of underbrush just below the surface cut and slashed at their feet. Jim spent that evening and all the next day doctoring fifty-two paws and making fifty-two moccasins from woolen blankets. In the intense cold he could work only a few moments before thawing out his numb fingers. Boner refused to wear the moccasins. As soon as Jim would finish tying them, Boner tore them off.

"All right, you dumb mutt," Jim growled finally. "When your feet get sore enough you'll be glad to wear these pads."

Near the end of the third day among the hills, Jim moved ahead to break trail again in heavy going. He stumbled over a hidden snag and fell headlong beside Boner. The dog snarled and instantly his sharp fangs slashed Jim's arm from shoulder to elbow. Jim scrambled to his feet and in a rage grabbed his rifle from the sled and swung it above his head. Boner crouched with his nose between his paws looking up at him. The dog's tail thumped the snow tentatively. Jim lowered the gun.

Blood was running down his arm as he built a fire. He applied antiseptic and bound the ugly wound with a clean cloth. After he sewed his sleeve he unhitched all the dogs except Boner and for the next two hours grimly forced the big malemute to drag at the sled alone. Jim pushed from behind to keep the heavy load moving but saw to it that Boner strained to the utmost, which he did willingly enough.

At length Jim made camp for the night. Boner was exhausted but showed no resentment. Jim accepted the fact the dog had not recognized the punishment for what it was. Boner's savagery had been an instantaneous response of instinct, not of meanness. Nothing short of death could change that.

THEY came into Holy Cow at noon—sixteen days and four hundred miles since leaving Alaska City. Three hundred miles more to go and already Jim was five days behind Johannson's schedule. Not only was he behind but he was tired, very tired. Never had he been so completely, so terribly tired.

A group of screaming children followed him down the street and stood, big-eyed, while he unloaded bags of mail. Mothers hurriedly threw shawls over their heads and congregated in the store which served as a Post Office. Pearson, the storekeeper, helped carry the bags inside. He was a short, round man with a flabby smile and a bustling manner.

"You looked bushed," he said. "Better rest up here tonight. This trail work is hard on you when you ain't used to it."

Jim shook his head. "I still have mail for Price's," he said. "They're waiting for it. I'll rest for a week when I get back to Alaska City."

The women stood in line for half an hour while the mail was being sorted. They chattered like excited children on Christmas morning waiting for the door to be opened on the Christmas tree.

A youth slouched in and draped his long length on the counter. He had an

angular red face and loose lips that yet were not loose enough to cover buck teeth set wide apart.

"Hello, Huck," Pearson said.

"Hullo, Pearse."

"Still workin' in the mines?"

"Naw. I quit. New mail man, huh?"

Pearson slapped the counter. "All right, ladies." With the importance due his position he began to pass out the mail. The women crowded forward, silent now, eagerly reaching for packages and letters when their turn came. Inevitably there were some who received nothing. Their eager eyes fell, faces stiffened, and they slouched away as though ashamed.

An old woman had been standing in line nervously twisting her fingers or plucking at the fringe of her shawl.

She turned her seamed face up to the storekeeper. "But, Mr. Pearson," she said, "there must be something for me. Johnny—I know my Johnny would write. He's in Chicago, you know. You just look again."

"No, Mrs. Williган," Pearson said kindly, "there's no letter for you. John didn't write again this time. Maybe you'll get something next trip."

She stared at him with brimming eyes. "I know Johnny wouldn't forget!" she cried, a note of hysteria in her voice. "He wouldn't ever forget—not my boy! It's got lost, or—or—" Suddenly she clamped her lips and glanced quickly about. Head down, she hurried out the door.

Pearson shook his head after her. When they all were gone Jim sought out the doctor to have his arm dressed where Boner had slashed him. It was an ugly wound but not serious.

Then he carried Price's mail bag out of the store and tied it down on the sled. The youth sauntered after him. He held a rifle loosely in the crook of his arm.

"I'm Huck Price," he said. "You got a letter in there for Pa. Pa said I should take it."

Jim straightened. "I'm afraid I can't do that."

"It's from Seattle. Prob'ly registered. Pa said I should take it soon's it came."

"Unless you've got that in writing, I have no authority to give it to you."

Huck's eyes narrowed. "You mean you ain't gonna gimme that letter?"

Jim shook his head. Huck swung about and disappeared between two buildings. Jim headed down to the river. The Katzak was narrow and twisting and the ice was marked with hummocks which made travel difficult. His next and last mail stop was Price's trading post ninety miles up this stream.

The river turned sharply and in half a mile the town of Holy Cow was completely hidden beyond the hills. It was good to feel hard ice under his feet again, in spite of its roughness. He ought to make fifteen or twenty miles yet today.

A LONG figure came out of a clump of stunted timber ahead and hurried out to meet him. A woolen scarf covered most of the man's face but there was no mistaking the slouching gait or plaid mackinaw.

Jim pulled up.

"I'll take that letter now," Huck said. He held the rifle under his arm with his finger on the trigger.

"A holdup?"

"All I want's that one letter."

"I suppose you know this is United States mail."

"They'll never ketch me—where I'm goin'. Just gimme it."

Jim moved up beside the sled. "You'll have to come and get it, Price."

Huck deliberately set the rifle butt against his shoulder and sighted along the barrel. The black muzzle looked directly into Jim's face.

"I said gimme that letter," he said. "I'd just as soon drill you as not. Get it outa there and throw it to me."

Jim hesitated. "I guess I can't argue with a gun." He bent down and opened the mail bag. Sorting through a pile of envelopes he found the one he was looking for. "Here it is," he said.

He tossed the letter toward Huck. The envelope landed halfway between them, face down.

"You better make a fast trail," Jim said. "The government has a habit of catching up with mail thieves."

"You can move on now, Mr. Mail Man. And keep goin'!"

"Sure." Jim turned toward the rear of the sled. "But maybe you'd better be

sure that's the right letter before I go. I'd hate to think you were chasing me with that gun. Couldn't sleep nights."

"That's right," Huck muttered. "I better look."

He advanced cautiously, keeping the rifle trained on Jim's chest. He bent down and reached for the envelope. For a moment his eyes lowered.

At that moment Jim sprang. During the brief space he was in the air he saw Huck's startled face and he saw the gun muzzle jerk up and spit flame. Then he landed and the two men rolled and skidded about on the ice. Huck fought like a wildcat, scratching, gouging. He had the strength of a maniac. For the first time, Jim felt fear as his tired muscles failed to respond.

He broke away and scrambled to his feet. The dogs had set up a racket and were jerking at their harness. Huck swarmed upon him. Jim ducked low and plowed his fist into Huck's abdomen. Jim slipped and went down on one knee, but he was up before Huck recovered. Jim swung desperately. Huck stiffened and his feet slipped from under him. His head cracked solidly against the ice.

The battle was over. Jim ran to the sled for a babiche thong with which to tie the other's wrists. Then he picked up the letter.

"An advertisement from the Wild West Saddlery Company." He grinned as he stuck it back into the mail bag.

Huck stirred and finally sat up, shaking his head stupidly.

"What am I going to do with you, Price?" Jim said. "I could take you back to the Marshall . . . but I think that instead we'll go on and have a talk with your old man."

"I'd rather you took me to the marshal," Huck mumbled.

"That's what I thought."

Huck got up heavily. "You took an awful chance," he said. "I damn near shot you. You could o' give me that one little letter. No skin off your nose."

"I told them I'd deliver the mail," Jim said grimly, "and, by God, that's what I aim to do."

They covered the ninety miles to Price's in two and a half days in spite of Huck's lagging steps. Huck was sullenly obedient although on the second night he pleaded with Jim to let him go.

Price's trading post was a long structure of rough-hewn logs and one smaller building, undoubtedly a store house.

John Price seemed to fill the big room. Jim dropped the mail bag on the floor. Price was taller and broader than Jim, a giant of a man, with a heavy, solid way of moving like a bulldozer. His hearty smile faded when his eyes fell on Huck's wrists lashed together.

"What's this?" he demanded. He had a voice to go with his size.

Huck stood silent, watching his mother who hurried from behind the counter. Her hand was at her throat as she stared from one to another.

Jim untied Huck's bonds. "I had no legal right to bring him with me," he said. "But I thought it was better this way."

Jim opened his coat and drew a bulky envelope from an inside pocket. "Here is a letter for you, Mr. Price, from Seattle. It's registered. I have been taking special care of it all the way and I'm sure glad to get rid of it."

Price fingered the letter thoughtfully. His questioning gaze traveled from Huck to Jim and back again. Huck stared dejectedly at the floor. Price's body jerked with sudden realization and he clenched the letter in his hand. "Then you— What have you got to say, boy?"

"Nothin', I guess, Pa."

Price waited a long moment. "You knew this letter was comin'. You knew there's five thousand dollars in it. You knew what that money means to Ma and me. But you tried to steal it."

Huck shuffled uncomfortably and glanced at Mrs. Price. Jim heard the sharp intake of her breath. Suddenly the old man straightened. Dark blood rushed to his face and he strode up to tower over the cringing youth. He lifted a trembling fist above his head.

"John!" the woman screamed.

PRICE hesitated and then slowly lowered his arm. His shoulders sagged. "Always it's been 'John,' " he muttered. " 'John.' All his life. But I'm through listenin'." With one sweep of his powerful arm he sent Huck sprawling. "This

time you're going to pay." He turned to Jim. "I'm thankin' you for not turnin' him over to the Law. I think I can say he'll never try to steal another letter. Now, Jane, put the coffee on. We'll eat."

It was a silent and uncomfortable dinner. Jim left immediately afterward, although his lethargic body was crying for rest. Two hundred miles to go. All the mail was delivered and there remained only the last lap back to Alaska City. Already he was two days overdue but he estimated he could make it in less than four days more. If he could hold out that long.

With the lightening of the sled load the pace was faster. The malemutes were gaunt and tired but seemed to sense they were on the way home. Jim rode the sled runners more and more often.

The temperature after rising for a brief interval had descended steadily. The thermometer hanging on the sled now showed forty-two below. There was no wind and the dog's breath crystallized into white clouds. But it was weakness, more than the cold, that caused him to make an early camp that night.

In the morning it was as though he had not rested at all. His feet were lead. It seemed that every muscle of his body was working independently of all the others—and refusing independently to work. He set his mind grimly to forcing each leg to drag itself forward. He thought of Johannson who made this trip regularly, and made it faster.

Seventy-five more miles. Two days. Just two days more and he could sink into bed at the hotel, that deep, soft, warm bed. And sleep. Just sleep, until he starved to death.

He walked behind the sled over a long stretch of windswept ice, sagging over the handlebars. Suddenly he became aware of a strange sound beneath him and leaped aside. But too late. The ice gave way and he plummeted down like a shot to land hard on gravel fifteen feet below.

He sat up dazedly. He was in a domed cavern of ice, perhaps eighty feet long and thirty feet wide. Drum ice. Water had receded underneath leaving a hollow shell. Walls on all sides curved inward in a high, sweeping half circle. Well, this finally was the end of things. He lay back down and stretched out on the gravel. Nobody could get out of this. Now he could sleep . . .

Sometime later he climbed stiffly to his feet. Probably he was between the shore and an island, perhaps between two islands. The gravel floor sloped sharply and ended in a drop-off. The ice wall on that side was three feet beyond. He looked up at the jagged hole in the two-feet-thick ceiling through which he had fallen. In the gravel floor there was nothing he could pile up to help him reach it.

He had heard of men falling through drum ice like this and slowly starving and freezing to death. There was little traffic on the river, he had seen no one at all, and any musher who came along would see only a hole in the ice and make a wide detour. Again he inspected the dirty gray walls. All solid. A slow rage burned within him. This was a hell of a way to die, like a prisoner in a dungeon.

In grim desperation he selected a spot where the wall seemed to have the least slope and began hacking upward. He had only a pocket knife which was a puny instrument indeed. At best he would have to cut through six to eight feet of solid ice. He had no real hope of making it but at least the attempt was better than yielding altogether and simply waiting to die.

Almost immediately the slender blade snapped off. The other blade lasted a little longer before it, too, broke. He was left with only the handle. In the half-light he searched for a sharp stone but there were only small round pebbles and they were frozen solidly.

He returned to the job and began pecking with the knife handle. A sliver at a time, a chip at a time, he cut at the ice. It seemed hours before he had to hack out toe and hand holds to lift himself higher. The knife wore down until it was a mere stub in his fingers. His arms became like lead; it was an effort even to hold them up. Yet still he worked, mechanically and stubbornly, while his bleeding fingers smeared the ice with red.

He scraped out the last two feet in pitch darkness. When his jabbing fingers finally broke through, it was with a sense of dull wonderment rather than triumph that he clawed out a hole large enough for his body. He dragged himself up through the opening and lurched to his feet. Cold as

it had been down below, it was colder here. He pulled his scarf over his face and limped down the river.

THE dogs had not waited for him. Although he had not really expected them he peered hopefully into the gloom. Seventy-five miles to go. Anyway, he thought bitterly, they can't say I didn't deliver all the mail.

He heard the whining of the dogs before he saw them. The sled had become entangled in the branches of a fallen tree frozen in the ice. Foxy set up a clamor at his approach and jerked at his harness in eagerness. The malemute's tail waved a violent welcome. There was only one other dog—Boner. Boner, the devil, the vicious, the unpredictable, stood quietly waiting. All the others had chewed themselves out of the harness and disappeared, but not before they had made a wreck of the sled load. In digging for food they had ripped blankets and food bags to shreds. Everything was ruined except a fifty pound tin of dog food.

Jim freed the sled and drew over to the bank where he built a fire. After giving the two dogs a generous feeding he took to the river again.

At camp that night seven of the team appeared, begging for food. The next day he picked up three more along the way. Only Tuck, the youngest of the malemutes, remained unaccounted for and in fact never was found. The call of his wolf blood proved stronger than his desire for human protection.

It was after midnight when the team straggled into Alaska City. Jim clung to the handlebars as much to hold himself up as to steady the sled. For once the dogs were silent, too exhausted to set up their usual racket. Jim put them in the kennels behind the Post Office and fed them.

All day the thermometer had hovered at fifty-three below. The still air had an unreal quality, a vivid, electric feel. But there was reality in the deadening cold.

He stumbled out on the street barely able to walk alone. The only light was in the saloon. There were a dozen men at the bar and they turned and stared at him as he lurched through the doorway. He looked like a man from another world. Hoar frost covered him from head to foot.

"Aw, it's the new mail man," someone laughed. "Must've been quite a trip."

Jim's stiff lips worked with difficulty and his voice sounded hollow in his own ears. "If any of you sisters," he managed thickly, "think that Johannson's job is a soft snap, I'm here to say you're a damned liar!"

They looked at him and at one another and then two of them came up and helped him carefully to the bar.

MILE-A-MINUTE BOXCARS

RIDE the Espee's "Overnight," the hottest of freights on the Frisco-Los Angeles run. Hear the roar of wheels on the grade, and meet the guys who speed the tonnage to its destination. There's rip-roaring adventure on this stretch of steel, presented by Gil Lathrop in the picture-packed August issue of

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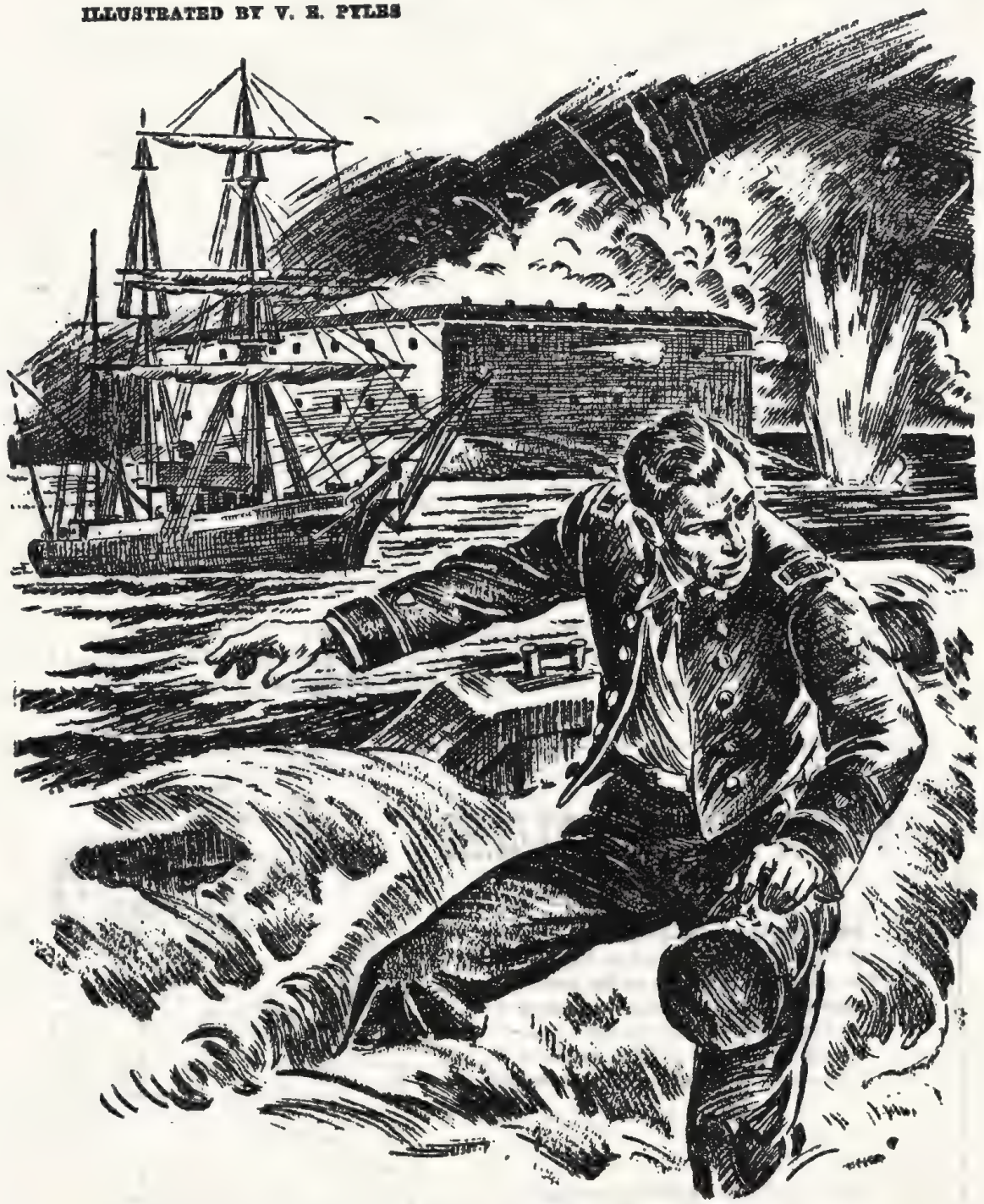
RANK HATH ITS PRIVILEGES

ILLUSTRATED BY V. H. FYLES



He forgot the shells, his shame, his pride and his dignity as he scrambled down the wet slippery deck. "What's wrong?" he shouted.

By R. W. DALY

LIEUTENANT Roger Martin was angry when he embarked in the commodore's boat, and took puny satisfaction in ignoring the flag lieutenant's friendly wave of farewell. The commodore could have done something about the situation. Instead, the commodore had been more or less amused by Martin's protest that the captain of the *Chicopee* was more than twenty numbers junior to him, and one of the dullest men in their class at Annapolis.

Martin paid little attention to the ships blockading Charleston once he had picked out the monitor to which he had been ordered as executive officer. Spray from the oars cooled his face but not his heart. He knew monitors inside out. He had been building them until enough ships had gone out on blockade to release him from

his responsible post at the Navy yard. He should have had his own ship immediately. Instead, he was expected to get his sea legs first.

He was bitter as the longboat drew alongside the *Chicopee*. Stepping across to the deck, with water lapping the overhang scant inches beneath his feet, he waited for Nesworthy to appear in answer to the flaghoist from the flagship, and in the interim distastefully surveyed the rusty plates and semi-naked crew. He didn't like monitors; even a slight sea gave them trouble.

Nesworthy did not appear.

A brawny man with a boatswain's whistle on a lanyard around his neck finally broke away from a party working with a firehose near the turret, came over and said, "I'm O'Brien, sir."

Martin put his opinion of O'Brien into a contemptuous glance at O'Brien's regulation drawers and asked, "Is that the uniform of the day?" He himself was uncomfortable in the limp, humid prison of his best blues, and the woolen trousers scratched the backs of his legs.

"You could call it that," O'Brien said indulgently. "This way, sir."

"I know the way!" Martin snapped, not caring for O'Brien's casual indifference towards an officer. "Take my gear below."

"Aye aye, sir," murmured O'Brien, and grinned as the new executive officer stalked over to the after hatch, angrily neglecting to dodge the sea water being hosed over the deck to cool off the ship.

Martin missed nothing en route to the captain's cabin. The laxness that Nesworthy allowed in the men's attire was illustrated further in peeling paint and soiled bulkheads. He was disgusted to think that the commodore valued Nesworthy as an excellent officer.

The *Chicopee* had steam up and the passageway was like the Sahara. In front of the cabin door, Martin paused to wipe his face and then replaced his cap properly squared. In response to a knock, Nesworthy's voice languidly invited him to enter.

Martin halted before he was fully into the cabin. The Nesworthy he had despised at the Academy had been a short, plump, constantly merry youngster. The captain of the *Chicopee* braced up on his elbows on an untidy bunk was still short, but the bones of his face, shoulders and chest showed through taut, corded muscles. There was no merriment in the bloodshot eyes.

"Hullo, Roger," Nesworthy said, after a visible moment of strained recollection. "Come in." Almost painfully, he pulled himself upright.

"Hullo, Jim," Martin murmured, momentarily shocked out of the conversational gambit he had planned. Except for the voice, he wouldn't have recognized Nesworthy, who once looked up with awe at a man who could stand second in their class.

"How are things up North?" Nesworthy asked, offering Martin a cigar from a box on the tiny desk.

Martin remembered that he was face to face with the enemy and declined any pleasantries that would undermine his superior position. "Let's get this straight," he said crisply. "I don't like the idea of serving under a junior. My orders were urgent and I didn't have a chance to get a transfer request endorsed before shoving off. I am going to put a request through now. I hope our association will be as brief as possible."

"Haven't changed, have you?" Nesworthy remarked wearily.

"I have seen no need to."

Nesworthy pulled on his cigar. "For your information, Roger, this is as unpleasant for me as it is for you. I asked for an experienced deck officer, not an engineer."

"See here—!"

"Later," Nesworthy cut in. "It's too hot now."

"Aren't you forgetting something? I—"

"I'm forgetting a great deal. I'm also remembering I'm the captain of this ship. Hurry up and write your request." He leaned back on his bunk, and put the cigar on a tray. "Stow your gear and try to get some sleep. We can start breaking you in this evening."

"I don't need any breaking in!" Martin said hotly. "Damn it, Nesworthy, who the devil do you think you're talking to?"

"I'm talking to a temporary executive officer who's smarter than I am. See you later." With this, Nesworthy closed his eyes, and in a moment or two began to

snore like an exhausted man who has reached the end of five solid weeks of unbroken night watches, Martin glared at the sleeper's face, walked out of the cabin, and deliberately slammed the door.

IN HIS stateroom, Martin sat down and wrote letter after letter to the Secretary of the Navy until he produced a version which did him credit and put his point across. Reduced to sodden underwear, he wrapped a towel around his arm and wound a sheet over his head so that sweat would not spoil the fair copy he carefully wrote in his best hand. Then he put the letter on Nesworthy's desk.

Martin thought he was too mad to sleep, as he sweated the sheet on his bunk into a rumpled adhesive plaster. Hearing Nesworthy's placid snore through the thin wooden bulkhead separating their quarters only infuriated him further. Of course, he decided hazily, perhaps Providence had brought him to the *Chicopee*. The way she was handled, he would be doing the country a great service to restore the *Chicopee* to the Navy. He had a vision of the commodore gratefully acknowledging the superlative merits of the *Chicopee's* executive officer, begging him to reform the entire squadron.

He awoke because he was hungry, not because he had been summoned by a messenger, although the pounding of the main engine told him that the monitor was underway. He grimly dressed, angered by what could only have been a deliberate insult. Weighing anchor was an all-hands operation, yet he had been permitted to sleep, as though his presence would have been a liability. He was angry enough to ignore a plate of sandwiches and a pot of lukewarm coffee on his desk and hurried out into the dim passageway.

The magazine was closed, with the men of the ammunition chain sprawled against the bulkheads, so that he stepped on some and received muttered curses he could not trace. He pulled a man to his feet. "Is this the way you stand watch on this ship?" he asked sarcastically.

"Yes, sir," sputtered the surprised seaman.

"Who's in charge of this detail?"

"Greene, sir," the seaman said, jerking a thumb toward a middle-aged veteran squatting with his back on the ladder leading up to the turret.

Martin strode up to Greene and stood until the man got the idea that it would be polite to rise. "Greene," he said curtly, "get your men on their feet and keep them there."

"But, sir—"

"Do you recognize an order?"

"Aye, aye, sir," Greene mumbled, and stood aside from the ladder.

Laying aloft, Martin paid little attention to the grumbling he left behind him. An officer had no business attempting to be popular by permitting slackness. There was a right way to do things and a wrong way, and as far as he could see, the *Chicopee* was doing everything wrong. In the turret, one gun crew were on their feet, ready for action, while the other lounged against the riveted curve of the nine-inch armor. He straightened this out in a hurry. Both crews were standing as he mounted the ladder to the pilothouse, squeezed past the quartermaster, and emerged on the gratings where Nesworthy was hunched against the chest-high, hammock-piled rim, looking out to sea.

Martin blinked, accustoming his eyes to the night, which was softly flushed by the glow of Charleston. The blockaders were all cruising slowly, so that plunging runners would have to steer a devious course. The monitors formed the inner ring, for, despite their sluggishness, they had sufficient protection to pursue runners well within the range of the rebel batteries.

"Have a good nap?" Nesworthy asked pleasantly.

"Next time you get underway, I suggest that you have the courtesy to call me."

Nesworthy threw a cigar stump over the side and stared for a few moments at the phosphorescent water curling away from the monitor's overhang. Watching him, Martin was increasingly disturbed by the calmness with which Nesworthy ignored insolence. Martin wanted to create a conflict which the commodore could not afford to overlook, because the commodore had the power to transfer officers within his command, and Nesworthy apparently did not intend to be party to proud bickering. In this, Martin was deceived.

"In view of your attitude," Nesworthy

said, "I cannot in honor bring myself to sign the letter you placed on my desk."

Martin was staggered. He had not foreseen such a reaction. At the Academy, thanks to his ability, he had often been in a position to order Nesworthy around, and had counted upon the old habit of subordination to embarrass the captain of the *Chicopee*. Had they met ashore, Nesworthy would have been obliged to acknowledge Martin as his senior. Aboard ship, it should have been the same, except that the Navy had grown so fast some mistakes had occurred.

"When you're civilized enough to be civil, we can discuss this matter," Nesworthy said. "Until then, do your duty. You're here to get your sea legs again. Remember that."

MARTIN was obliged to face the fact that he was virtually a prisoner. He was among strangers, except for an antagonized Nesworthy, hovering off an enemy coast, and the operations of the blockade, if he could bring himself to admit it, were something beyond his experience. The proud habit of considering himself forever privileged with respect to a classmate, however, was a deeply ingrained belief. He was outraged to the point of murder that Nesworthy could so blithely disregard the sacred tenet which dictated that a letter must be sent with reasonable promptness from the first endorser to the next. He was outraged because he was helpless. "Would you mind explaining precisely what authority I have here?" he asked bitterly.

"You're my executive officer," Nesworthy snapped. "You forward my policies, and keep the ship in fighting trim."

Martin laughed mockingly. "I can't do both. Your policies don't seem to have done much towards making a fighting ship. With your approval, I'll make some changes."

"Why, you conceited—"

"Cap'n!" a lookout shouted.

Both officers looked out to sea in time to watch the brilliant explosion of a multicolored rocket in the north-east quarter. The signal from the outer ring told Nesworthy that a fast blockade-runner had slipped in and was steaming at full speed for the narrow Beach Channel of Sullivan's Island and Nesworthy acted upon the information with the smooth haste of a well-practiced veteran. "Two-thirds ahead!" he barked at the quartermaster. "Open the magazine."

Martin stood by the pilothouse, straining to catch everything that happened. There were bustling noises in the *Chicopee* and then her propeller began to thrash and she surged through the water at a breakneck six knots. Nesworthy mounted the pilothouse and stood naked against the glow of Charleston, taking bearings with a boat compass and shouting down to the quartermaster for course changes that piloted the monitor through the hazards of the shallows. A pair of monitors waddled out to the east, and the others continued their lazy, aimless cruising.

The *Chicopee's* crawl to the west mystified Martin, who had not devoted much thought to the problems of stopping rebel ships. Before the days of steam, blockading had been fairly simple. Now, with the shipyards of Europe laboring to produce vessels that would reap the great profits of Confederate trade, blockading had become a nerve-wracking business. As it was, four out of five swift steamers sailing from Bermuda or the Bahamas were able to enter Charleston. In time, the rate of attrition would spell Union victory, but the only sure way of shutting off trade, was to capture the port, and the Union army hadn't quite accomplished the conquest of Morris Island.

"One-third ahead!" Nesworthy called, as, bright and clear atop the masonry pile of Fort Sumter, range lights suddenly flickered a welcoming guide for the blockade-runner. Nesworthy boldly stood into the narrow, torpedo and hulk infested channel, and killed speed to bare steerageway when the monitor dominated the channel, lying on the range line.

Nesworthy ignored Martin to concentrate upon sighting the bulk of the runner or a sudden flare of flame from boilers fed with turpentine-soaked cotton waste. Acutely aware of the rebel batteries less than a thousand yards away, Martin was content to be ignored. Despite his period of service, this was his introduction to a shooting war, and he was chagrined to find his body sweating and his knees quivering.

Martin envied the cool, self-confident way in which Nesworthy perched on the pilothouse and waited for the fugitive to appear. He wanted to say that it seemed foolish to stand out in the open on an ironclad. He longed to at least duck down beneath the level of the shield, but could not let Nesworthy outdo him in courage, and so remained upright, chest and head nervously vulnerable. He wondered why the Rebs didn't shoot. The *Chicopee* was well within range. As the seconds grew into minutes, he felt he couldn't endure the strain, and then Nesworthy inexplicably put about, perfectly at home in waters he knew better than the Severn.

"THEY can't waste ammunition," Nesworthy remarked, with a touch of contempt that hinted at a knowledge of Martin's jellied stomach. "They'll shoot when it's worthwhile to distract us."

"Naturally," Martin murmured, as though he was well acquainted with the Charleston defenses. Nevertheless, he enjoyed knowing that the guns would be silent until the *Chicopee* was able to use her twin IX-inch Dahlgrens. The relief was short-lived.

"Pick up targets two points on port bow!" Nesworthy suddenly cried. The revolving turret, swinging to minimize damage from a solid bolt, abruptly ground to a halt, quivered, then halted again, and the gunner reported on target. "Fire one!" Nesworthy ordered. Instantly the night was seared by a roaring red aurora which gave Martin a glimpse of concussion flattened water, although he could not see the target. Five seconds later, the shell cracked in a brilliant stab of light that revealed a long, low steamer running with a bone in her teeth.

"Fire two!" Nesworthy cried, and on the echo of his words a patch of Sullivan's Island flared and Martin numbly stood his baptism of fire when a projectile slammed like a trip hammer into the turret and split into a hundred slashing harmless fragments. The *Chicopee's* second round splashed ahead of the steamer, richocheted and exploded.

Then, the other two monitors revealed their positions in the night by firing over the steamer, whose captain looked ahead to the silhouette of the *Chicopee* plugging Beach Channel like a cork wedged in the neck of a bottle and decided it wasn't worth dying for a cargo of silk dresses and toilet articles. The steamer showed white lights and signalled that she was heaving to. This did not please the Confederates on Sullivan's Island, and another battery opened up on the *Chicopee* within their grasp. Nesworthy put on full speed of eight knots and hunched over his compass to guide his ship out to the open sea.

Martin quivered as two shells detonated in the air near the monitor and rained clattering fragments onto her plates. Fascinated, he stared at Sullivan's Island. A shell went off close enough to warm his sweating face. Blinded, he knelt. He felt no pain, but made sure with his fingers that he hadn't been hit. His ears rang and he was content to stay behind the armor until vision slowly came back to his throbbing eyes. Discretion overcame his pride. Since he wasn't required to stay in the open, he ducked into the pilothouse.

"Rather heavy bombardment," he remarked with some embarrassment to the quartermaster, who was stolidly peering through the slit in the iron logs.

The quartermaster said nothing, because, as a matter of fact, the bombardment was desultory and didn't contain the solid ogival shot which was all the monitors had to fear. Ordinarily, Martin would not speak unnecessarily to an enlisted man on even condescendingly familiar terms. However, he felt an urge to justify his presence behind protection when the captain remained above, and said, "I think I have a slight concussion."

"Sir?" shouted the quartermaster, bobbing his head.

"I said I thought I had a slight concussion!"

"Not you!" the quartermaster snarled, and leaned out to catch Nesworthy's irately repeated orders. Frantically, the quartermaster leaned over the voice tube to shout down directions to put the helm hard right. It was too late. The monitor turned too sluggishly to avoid smashing her flat bottom into the submerged hull of a sunken blockade-runner. Martin thought the blow was light. The monitor merely lurched heavily to starboard, heeling her overhang well under water a few

times to send high waves crashing across her deck, and then stabilized into gentle rocking.

Nesworthy pushed his way into the pilothouse and growled down the voice-tubes until the *Chicopee* lost way. "Well, chatterbox," Nesworthy snapped at Martin, "so you don't need to learn anything, eh? In the future—if you have a future—remember that battle stations means silence." He glanced at the quartermaster. "Tell O'Brien to come topside and take command." He then scrambled below to assess the damage.

Martin's heart curled like a dead leaf. He stepped dazedly out of the pilothouse, completely mortified at being unable to answer Nesworthy's righteous anger. His distraction of the quartermaster had certainly caused the accident. There would be an investigation, of course, and he tried to imagine how he could justify himself before a jury of his peers. He hadn't meant any harm to the ship, yet his carelessness could well have ripped open her bottom.

When O'Brien appeared on the turret gratings, Martin had a flicker of pride at being superseded in his rightful place by an enlisted man, and trying to be casual, he turned his back on the pilothouse, too preoccupied to cringe from the scattered shells flung by the puzzled Confederates. He meant to study the masts of the wreck, so he would have a semblance of knowledge when his court-martial sat, but his view was blocked by a cloud of condensing steam which should not have been billowing aft of the turret.

HE HASTENED to the turret rim and saw men suddenly crowding out of the after-hatch, glanced forward and saw men streaming up out of the hatch forward. He forget the shells, his shame, his pride and his dignity, scrambling down onto the wet, slippery deck, skirting the stubby stacks, and grabbing the first man he met.

"What's wrong?" he asked, shouting above the hubbub of voices as tear-drenched men collapsed on the chill deck and sucked cool air into tortured lungs.

"The blowers are gone," the man mumbled, and knelt to vomit.

As he grasped what had happened, Martin felt like a man justly on the rack. The innocent rolling of the *Chicopee* after the crash had sent water splashing across the decks and some had spilled down into the air intakes to the fireroom. The water had soaked the leather belts that ran the air blowers, so that the belts slipped and the blowers stopped, and the asphyxiating gases of coal combustion filled the fireroom and then the ship.

Martin glanced at the batteries. The *Chicopee* was completely helpless, as the engineer shut off steam to the machinery. Her men were naked before the terrible shells and it was all his fault. With the monitor pinned down, the Rebs would soon send the steel projectiles whistling into her. Unless the blowers were started so the ship could be worked, it was the end. Martin saw his court-martial become the very serious matter of having caused the loss of a naval vessel, and realized numbly that his past record would mean nothing. It would be bad enough if men were already dead below.

He squarely faced the facts and accepted his responsibility. If anything was to be done, it was up to him to do it. He had built monitors and knew them thoroughly. A shell splashed into the water short of the monitor, and fortunately did not explode. "Get in the lee of the turret!" he ordered, roughly propelling men on their way until they perceived that the turret afforded some protection from the enemy.

Martin soon stood alone at the after hatch. He knew what to do and hesitated, because he also knew that it would probably cost him his life if he didn't work fast enough. Then he noticed Nesworthy stumbling towards him. He had a simple task, which, with leisure, wouldn't have involved any risk. But there wasn't any leisure. A shell cracked just beyond the stern and a splinter gouged the deck by his feet as he cowered. He made up his mind. Death seemed to be coming one way or another. Going to the water, he soaked his shirt, stood up and faced the oncoming Nesworthy, breathed deeply several times, waved his hand, and plunged down the hatch, tying the shirt around his mouth and nostrils.

It was completely black. The gases

had extinguished the ship's lights. Martin made his way along by touch, cringing lest his feet slip onto a body, but impelled by desperation to proceed as fast as he could. Even if the lights had been on, his eyes streamed with tears, and he couldn't have seen anything. His only consolation was his abstinence from tobacco, for his breath lasted until he reached the fireroom and got in. A moment or two cheered him slightly, for as far as he could ascertain, every man in the fireroom had escaped. Then the heat wilted him to the limit of his endurance, and he knew he had to breathe.

The shirt around his face had been evaporated almost dry and he forced himself to stay clear of panic. Groping, he found the drinking water tub, which held enough water to soak his shirt. Swiftly, he raised the dripping linen to his face, gently exhaled, and gently tried the air. His lungs seared and he gasped involuntarily, but the lifting of the pressure in his chest convinced him he could get enough oxygen to do his job.

Hoping that the court-martial would take his efforts of redress into account, steadying a mad impulse to flee, he planned his moves. Orienting himself by touch, he found the base of a blower. He grinned slightly as he thought of Nesworthy's scorn of engineers. If Nesworthy had been a thorough-going engineer, this could have been avoided, because the new monitors had a simple installation which obviated the trouble of water coming down the stacks.

RAISING himself carefully along the blistering side of the boiler, Martin grimly ignored his roasting fingers until he touched the soaked leather of the blowers. Removing the belt with a few deft tugs, he placed it on the boiler where it would dry swiftly, and climbed down. Nesworthy would never think of a thing like that, he told himself grimly, but Nesworthy was all right anyway. If he got out and had a chance, he wanted to tell Nesworthy he was sorry.

The water in the tub felt like the winds blowing through Cape Horn, and he knew by the dullness creeping back into his chest that the gases he had breathed were getting in their work. He worked fast on the second blower, and then went back to the belt on the boiler. The leather was nearly baked dry and he expended the last of his energy forcing it back into place and opening the valve of the auxiliary engine.

He collapsed, wishing his strength had lasted long enough for him to show Nesworthy how sweet a little piece of machinery like a blower sounded in a fireroom whose temperature was 140 degrees. Engineers were useful after all.

When he came struggling back from the hottest pool of liquid fire in Hell, he was flat on the deck of the *Chicopee* and the stars were overhead and the guns of Sullivan's Island were still. He knew by the vibration of his bones that the monitor was steaming under her own power. He focused his eyes on O'Brien squatting beside him, dipping a towel in a bucket of water.

"Glad you came to," Nesworthy said, abruptly appearing on Martin's other side. "For a while you looked like you'd be our only casualty, after O'Brien got you out."

Martin choked up. His lungs didn't burn as much as his eyes, because briefly and kindly, Nesworthy both forgave him and passed the word that let Martin live again; he hadn't been responsible for anyone's death.

"I guess I need to learn a few things, Captain," Martin said humbly. "Hold back that transfer letter, will you?"

Nesworthy lighted a cigar. "Captain, eh? I can learn something, too, y'know."

"You're the captain," Martin said. "But you're wrong about not needing another engineer. This won't happen again. I can fix it."

"Good," Nesworthy said, putting the towel on Martin's forehead. "We'll talk about it later."

And it wasn't much later that Martin learned he had not gallantly saved the *Chicopee* after all, because Nesworthy had merely signalled a monitor to take him under tow out of action. By that time, however, Martin had even been reconciled to the discovery that Nesworthy was forever senior to his classmates, having been spot promoted for his work on the Charleston blockade to the exalted rank of lieutenant-commander.

When all the torches were blazing, the leader spoke again. "Lead on!" he told the Finn. Armand bent his knees and hitched himself forward.

RAID BY TORCHLIGHT

By HALLEY G. GATES

ILLUSTRATED BY
EVERETT RAYMOND KINSTLER

ARMAND KATILLA (Armakat, the Norwegians called him) woke to sounds that filled his short round body with terror. The hubbub of voices accompanied the banging on the stout pine door.

For a moment it seemed all a part of his dream. That old nightmare of the time when his father's home, on the frozen marshes of Finland, had been entered by a roving band of armed Swedes. Then a boy of eleven he had saved himself by diving through the oiled parchment of the one large window as the place was set afire.

The laughing bearded men had gone off. In the light of flaring torches he had seen them carrying the few family treasures, his mother's hand-hammered brass chest, tapestries his grandfather had bought on a Rostock trading trip, the featherbeds his aunts had fashioned, filled with down of the wild white geese snared in the marshlands. He had survived, but he would never forget what he had seen in the ashes next day, and the flight in deep snows through the holdings of unfriendly clans.

The knocking and hoarse yells continued. He was a man now but old fears made him feel a child again. His knees were weak as he stumbled across the floor.

Opening the door his hazel eyes widened and his round and ruddy shaven face went white. Before him in the light of a single torch stood more red and yellow bearded men clad in fur skins, the fur turned inward. In their hairy hands were swords and clubs. Straps held shields around left shoulders. The device on the shields showed them to be Sven's men, the Swede clan that refused to make peace with its neighbors, men who made war because they loved war—their own kind of war. Men feared from Ivgorod to Narvik.

One, obviously the leader, was better dressed and bore a dagger in a sheath of hand-tooled leather. A golden chain was around his throat. What was it so familiar about him? He was old, forty years or so. Was it that scar across the right cheek? What was it about that scar? Armand never decided but he wondered.

"Hey, scared lynx!" the scarred one with the dagger shouted. The men around him laughed, their breath puffing white clouds in the frosty air.

Armand saw they were on skis. "Yes," he said. His pinched voice made them laugh again.

Their accent was quite different but enough words got through to him. And their hostile attitude was unmistakable. For a moment he wished he were armed. But what folly! What could he do against so many?

Besides, when he'd found this refuge

high in the Norse mountains he'd forsworn any weapon except bow and arrow or knife or snare, against the animals he needed for food and clothing. Hatred of what men do to one another, through cruelty and greed, had been part of his simple nature since the raid that robbed him of parents, brothers, sister and so many neighbors along the marshes of his homeland. Here he'd been safe so far, lo these eight years, after seven others when he'd been sheltered by friendly folk high in the the mountains farther north. It had been, lonely since then, but he'd stayed alive.

NOW he must answer this red-bearded giant who so arrogantly stood outside his low doorway.

"You know this country?" the big one with the dagger said. The scar grew whiter as his color deepened.

"Some. Just nearby. I don't go anywhere much."

"Go on. Talk!"

"I live alone. Don't talk much. I'm Finnish, not Norveg or Svenska."

"But you're here," the leader said.

"He's just a lemming," another put in. He made a motion imitating the small rodent. Many laughed at this.

"All right. You're a Finn. That's good," the leader said. "You know this country though. You're a mountain man. I see your skis outside the door here. Now tell me. . . ." He looked hard at the smaller man, a fierce glance that took in sandy hair, hazel eyes, small nose and round blanching cheeks. "Tell me. You have friends in the village down there?" He pointed to the southwest.

"Down there?" Armand asked. Now he shook the more and it was not all from cold. He looked around at the armed band and guessed their purpose. They never left any alive if they could help it. Not even women and girls, after exacting the ancient toll of conquerors.

"Answer me!"

"I hate them." The Finn gulped.

"Good. Get dressed. Onto your skis if you're any good at all. Are you?"

"I can manage." Armand groped for a taper and lighted it. The bearded giant stooped and entered the cabin.

"Good. And you know the way down out of these dark mountains? And at night?"

"As if I couldn't! I have to go for some things in daylight. But they—they—always rob me." He spoke with an effort. "And—they laugh at me. Mostly I go down dark nights to catch fish. Then they don't see me. You see I don't talk like them and I'm short. They laugh at me."

"Yes, you're a runt But you're our man."

"Of course. How I hate them!"

"Well, make it fast. And how about food for myself and my men?"

Armand was given no chance to answer. But he winced as he saw them blunder into the cabin and break into his food stores. He lacked the food he needed for even a part of the winter. He was still going to have to stalk and kill—maybe fish too—just to live himself. It was sickening how fast three and twenty hungry aliens could ransack his stocks, use up his fuel supply, drag out his straw-filled bedding and break up his hand-hewn table and jointed bench to make another fire outside and leave him nothing but a bare shelter.

His agony was not lost on the leader nor his chattering teeth. The men had brought more than the night cold in with them.

"Don't worry, fellow. Be done with your dressing. You lead us safely to the village and you'll live like a prince." The big man pulled out a tooled leather sack and jingled the coins inside.

"Yes, of course." Armand managed a smile. He wondered if he would be allowed to return, by these men or any villagers who escaped them.

"All right. Hurry now," the leader said. "You!" pointing menacingly at Armand Katilla. "And you." He cupped an imperious hand to indicate the rest to follow.

"Yes, sir." The Finn donned his heavy sheepskins. The others had not removed their outer wraps. They shuffled through the door behind the leader to join the group outside. All began buckling on skis. Armand took his down, inspecting them for ice particles under the runners and very carefully fastened them.

The leather thongs had to be quite tight.

"Well now, fellow." It was the leader again.

"Yes, sir."

"How do we go? You lead."

"Yes. I'm glad to . . . But we mustn't be seen. Mustn't give warning."

"Why? What can they do?" The leader looked his contempt.

"They always watch down there. They keep swords and shields ready." That was not true. It was a long time since the Norsemen had raided the isles to the west and the lands to the south. They were fishermen now. Swords and shields with battleaxe and mace were now ornaments on peaceful Christian walls. How very easy to slaughter them, warned or unwarned. But a plan was forming in Armand's plodding head.

"You say they keep ready? Why? Tell me why."

"For fear of the Picts." He saw the leader was puzzled. "Old enemies across the stormy sea. The Danes too," he said.

"Oh?" That was a new thought. "So, fellow. You seem to know. How then do we surprise them?"

"We must go by a ravine between this mountain and the hills by the sea. So, we come into the village without being seen. Then . . ." Armand drew a finger across his throat.

"Good! Good!" several henchmen said. "A good fellow this." They imitated the gesture and laughed coarsely. The leader laughed too. It made Armand feel a bit easier.

"All right. You are a good fellow. There'll be another gold piece for you—when this night's work is done. Then we'll go back with gold and furs and food and nice things for our poor homes. And you will be well repaid, never fear."

"Thank you." Armand bowed slightly thinking of his denuded cabin. "But there's one thing."

"What now, fellow?" Red eyebrows drew together. Blue eyes narrowed.

"It's a hard way to go. Your men good skiers?"

"Listen to him!" someone cried. "Listen to the beardless one!" The big men roared with laughter.

But the leader said again with an edge, "What do you mean?"

"Can all ski and well? It's very dark unless the north lights come out. And the way is dangerous."

THE leader said, "My men can ski to the moon and back. They are the able-bodied men of the clan. All picked men. The weaklings are dead or home with the old cripples and the women. Yes, my men can ski. We'll make proof of that."

"Fine. But there is no light tonight. Moon is down. Stars are dim. No north light. And it's very dangerous. But we have to go that way, down the ravine or the town will be warned and waiting."

A lieutenant of the leader's laughed. "Did you ever hear such a yokel?"

But the leader was thinking of their raid, with more food ahead if they succeeded. If they didn't . . . He'd never doubted success before. He thought of the long trek uphill and back to their homes. And the food stocks they had exhausted in the Finn's cabin, the one habitation on the way. Quietly now he asked, "Can we do it tonight?"

Armand said, "Yes, tonight. Best at night. All in their homes, sleeping. Or at least in bed, cozy and warm."

"Yes." The leader licked his lips. "All right. How best to do it?"

"Your men must have torches."

"And is that all?"

"Yes."

"Say, you're a simple fellow. Why didn't you say so before? We'll go by torchlight."

"Yes, by torchlight," the Finn repeated. "Very pretty."

Another bellow greeted this. "Listen to the oaf. Very pretty." The men mimicked his strange accent.

"Enough!" the leader commanded. "All right. Torches all and let's be off. But wait!" Turning again to Armand the blue eyes narrowed to slits. "Won't they see our lights? Come now, fellow!" The dagger slid out.

"No! No!" Fear made Armand convincing. The dagger went back in.

"Well, quick then!"

"If we go the way we can go at night without lights, instead of down the ravine, we pass houses soon. They will give the alarm."

"Ho! We can take care of that. The way we surprised you."

"No. There are too many in the first hamlet. Sometimes someone escapes." He sucked in his breath. "They would get to the big mountain horn or light the beacon fire. It is all built and ready and soaked in fish oil." Armand felt his face grow hot from the effort of this speech. Or was it the turmoil of his feelings?

The leader stroked his beard while his men waited impatiently. Here was a fellow with sense, the big man thought. His men felt otherwise, scorning so much talk.

But their chief was still distrustful. "So?"

"I take you the hard way, the dark way, but only because you say your men are good on skis. Villagers then can't see until the last minute. Then . . . it will be too late."

"I see. So . . .?"

"But too dangerous that way without lights."

"Right. I believe you. But—mark this! —your life is forfeit if . . ." The Finn nodded. "Ah, I see you count on your pay for this night's work." He smiled as he ordered the band to hurry with the torches. "Don't forget, Finn! I'll be right behind you." He laid hand on the dagger again.

"Of course. Yes."

Broken and dead lower limbs rich in resin from the pine trees Armand loved were gathered and live branches mutilated in completing the stout torches. He saw them thrust the tips into the outside fire —made of his furniture to cook their meal out of his stores. When all were blazing the leader spoke again.

"Lead on!" He handed the Finn a torch. It was a good one.

Armand bent his knees and hitched himself forward. He began gliding down the narrow trail from the cabin. The leader leaped upward and forward and nearly overran the Finn's skis.

"Is that the best you can do? We thought you were a skier," he taunted.

Armand said nothing, but looking back he saw the flaring torches trailing sparks as the whole line got going. He toed in his skis to slow his descent while the leader heaped scorn upon him but as guide he noticed they were forming a tight line. They'd need to stay that way over this dangerous trail to the town by the sea.

There was only one rise between them and the full down grade of seven miles. The compact line became irregularly spaced as they made the climb of one hundred twenty ski-lengths. Up past jutting black rocks blown clear of snow and through dark corridors of fir trees they went, the torches accenting the gloom.

Then the snow began to fly as they started down. Powdered particles bit their cheeks. The dry snow clouds thrown up glowed pink in the torchlight. Armand saw they were keeping close together and always the leader was right behind him, slowing down constantly to keep from a collision. From time to time he taunted the Finn.

Round one dizzy curve after another they went now, faster and faster. Down the heavily filled slopes he led them, the leader always behind, his greater weight giving him speed. The Finn felt blue eyes boring into his small back as he crouched over his skis. One slip and he knew how he'd be thrown. But what would happen in the town if the plan failed? He didn't want to think that far ahead of his present danger.

All along the line he could see torches were held high, pushed forward to keep the flames going. But here and there one went out, the fire blown upward or put out by the swirling clouds of snow.

The smell of the sea began to ascend the slope.

That voice bellowed right behind Armand. "Sure this is the right way?"

"I am sure."

Now came the faster descent with a quick curve to the left before the final long glide into the narrow trail along the fjord where the town huddled. Armand waved and waggled his torch. He called back to the leader always right behind him. "Careful. We go down. Follow hard behind."

The leader repeated the torch waving. With the wind whistling and snow swishing, Armand could hear the order repeated from man to man in the file of raiders. Each man waved his torch in turn. They were good on the boards, these Swedes.

They were close together and crowding him as they followed around the bend of the mountain.

"Can't you go faster?" a voice rasped behind him. "We have to keep slowing down."

"I will try!" he called back. No time to say more. Here you had to make a sharp left turn. Soon . . . Now! This was the spot right ahead. Would he make it or . . . ?

He must not think of failure. To the right was the precipice, the drop a sheer one hundred ski-lengths down.

At that instant a light appeared, and another, far ahead and down. Armand's throat tightened. To the old heathen gods, then to his new Christian God, he prayed, "Don't let them see them . . . yet!"

Now with steady voice he shouted back, "Careful . . . we go fast." He could hear the wind snatch at his words and the words passed back by the leader to the closely packed file.

The Finn rounded the turn above the steep cliff holding his torch high and pressed against the wind. His must not go out! They were following his light.

He gave a spring upward and forward and shot ahead of the close-following leader by five ski-lengths. One more instant and he'd be out of his sight behind a jutting rock. Twisting his hips sharply against the perilous turn he bent his body to the left. His right arm came back and whipped forward.

The torch flew out of his hand and hurtled straight out into dark and empty space while he crouched and plowed into a wall of darkness.

HE STOOD breathless, heart hammering against his ribs. For a moment, there was no sound save the tumbling of shale and the swish of sliding snow. He turned from the snow wall to peer back across the narrow hard-packed trail. Lights and sounds! But the lights were a ragged line of falling torches and the sounds wails of terror and rage growing ever fainter, drifting up in the northern stillness.

As Armand retied his skis with a burned right hand he looked down at the town ahead. More lights were coming on. Blinking oblongs of yellow showed where doors were thrust open and as quickly shut.

There was the distant clash of metal on metal in the frosty air. Then shouts, very faint but increasing in volume.

Shaken, Armand paused before making another move. His knees quavered but the old haunting fear was gone. Once more he looked over the edge of the cliff where the raiders had fallen and the sliding snow had covered them. It was dark down there, a hundred ski-lengths down, every torch and voice extinguished in many feet of rock and snowslide. For a long moment there was no sound except the whispering of waves far out and beyond.

Now more shouts drifted up the trail. Armand bent his knees, sprang forward and started down. It was dark. He had no torch. But how well he knew the way. The dry snow flew out from under his skis.

Lights drew nearer. He could make out torches, then faces.

"Hallo! Hallo!" The sounds drifted up. "Who comes? Anyone?" That was old Sievert's voice. As Armand neared he could see a sword was in his hand. Others were around him. Old shields gleamed on left arms.

"Who comes?" The challenge was repeated. "Stop!" Now he knew they could see him.

"Armakat!" he called through cupped hands.

"Oh! You all right?"

"Yes. And all's well." But his voice was pinched. Now fast approaching he shouted it: "And all's well!" The wall of sheer rock high up to the left repeated it majestically: "All's . . . well!"

"Thank God," he heard several voices rumble as he neared them.

With a powdery swirl of his skis he drew up to the earnest faces lighted by torches. But these were other torches, other faces.

"Where are the others? I saw the lights."

That was Hulda speaking, Sievert's lovely daughter, she of the golden hair and honest gray eyes.

(Continued on page 129)

Igot reversed the blade in his hand and raised his arm to throw it. Fraynor hastily shot him four times.

A BAG OF HEAVEN'S TEARS

By RICHARD SALE

FRAYNOR saw that he had one advantage. The schooner was becalmed like his own small craft. But they could not paddle that schooner, and with his remaining strength, he could paddle the outrigger canoe and reach them before they caught a chance wind and veered off, leaving him alone on the waters.

It was late afternoon, and the ocean barely breathed. As far as he could see, all molten gold, no wind touched the surface of the Pacific at all. No catspaws, not even the swirl of a giant fish turning just beneath the surface. Only the infinite reach of sea, struck with sunlight, like a majestic glowing mirror.

And off there, west by southwest, if he could believe the tiny compass now, the sticks of the black schooner broke the pattern. There and there alone, of all the world that he could see, was there any

evidence of height. The world had been flat until he sighted those sticks. Now it regained a small perspective again.

Fraynor surprised himself. He did not have any idea where this cool new strength sprang from. A moment before, his body had been as dead and lethally placid as the day he lived in. He had sat in the outrigger, hot, spent, the paddle safely upon the floor of the canoe, his knees bent, his arms upon his legs, and his weary head upon his arms as his tongue hung out. And above him, the slate and dirt-stained triangle of canvas which had served him as a sail hung limply upon the short makeshift mast, as fatigued as himself, without even the flapping of its edges.

This strange calm had been upon the sea since dawn. It was not the sultry calm which precedes a hurricane. The sky held no smoky mists against a scarlet background of growling sky, the mark of the big wind. The sky was blue, cloudless, the sun rich and brilliant. Since dawn, and it was past four now, for the sun had long since past its zenith and was waning in its meridian.

That was what had frightened Fraynor. A thing like this might last for days. The error in the compass had made him lose himself to begin with. That same error, spoiling his rigid schedule, had used up his supplies and water. And finally, having corrected his compass, he needed wind—his dead reckoning told him—so that he might backtrack and raise Malorai which had been his original destination.

And then, the black schooner against the sky.

Schooners, particularly of such length, some seventy feet, do not suddenly appear upon the sea with such startling rapidity. There was no wind, and she needed wind for her set sails as much as he did. Yet there she was, where none had been, it seemed to him, only a few minutes before. Minutes? More like seconds.

Fraynor suddenly was afraid. He must have had his head upon his arms for a long time, and it had only seemed a moment. Men died that way. They just put down their heads to rest for a moment, and then they never regained consciousness. It was an easy way to die, really, like freezing, which always sounds so terrible and really is not. But Fraynor thought to himself with a touch of irony that he could not afford to die. He was too rich to be able to afford it. Only poor men died happy. Rich men always regretted the passing, and he was rich. Very rich.

While his head had been down, the moving ocean currents, invisible to his eye, had either brought him within sight of the schooner or vice versa. No matter. It was done, and thank God for it, for the tribulation was now over. He had only to reach that listless ship upon the listless sea, and the thing was done. Then the calm could last as long as it wished and he could laugh at it. There was water and food on the ship; that was all he needed. Not immediate locomotion. Just some rest.

The paddle was quickly in his hands and he bent to the task. It was easy paddling with so calm and smooth a sea, a bed of liquid glass for him to plane his frail but stout little craft upon. West southwest, the schooner began to grow in size. She had a familiar look. A moment of horror seized upon Fraynor: it would be the very devil if she were a ship out of Paoli where he had left behind a corpse. What rotten luck to run into men who knew of his deed, and of the bag of heavenly tears which he had tied into his belt.

But in a little while, as he came closer, he recognized her definitely and relaxed. She was not out of Paoli, but rather bound for it, so no one aboard knew of his murdering. She was the *Ma'o,* the *Shark,* of Captain Luft Dustenberry, a hardbitten old Frenchman who plied the islands in the copra trade and other businesses which did not exclude the carrying of passengers.

When Fraynor had left Paoli, the *Ma'o* was a week overdue and there was some worry about her having been lost at sea.

"Well," thought Fraynor, "she's my only chance. I've got to take that chance. I've got to persuade Dustenberry to skip Paoli and take me down to Malorai where I can get a packet for the east and the Hawaiians. Then I'll be safe. He'll do it, for one of God's own tears, he'll do it . . ."

His paddle bit into the sea savagely as he bore down on her.

WILLIAM FRAYNOR was an intelligent man. If he had not been, there is doubt that he would have found himself in such a discomforting position, afloat at sea without food or water. But even that little item which he had not expected in his plans was not due to his own efficiency but rather to the innate cleverness of the Kanaka, Igot, who had been his shipmate in the outrigger—up to a certain point.

But the whole thing began back further than that. It began the day he was dumped on the beach at Tuango in the Sporades, flat broke and drunk. Fraynor was an intelligent man, for the first thing he realized when he sobered was that he did not have a sou to his name and he was a long way from home, and that he would never get back again, drunk. Most of the 'combers beg, borrow and steal for a shot of whiskey, but Fraynor never touched it again after that morning when he came to with the sea washing his ears. He had passed out just below the highwater mark, and the cold touch of the tide made him stir and probably saved him from drowning.

He instantly began a firm rehabilitation. In Tuango, he was completely courteous with everyone he met, even the greasy, spidery Chinamen, Canton coolies without souls who had come into the south Pacific to take all the money they could find. Fraynor quickly won the respect of those he met. He managed to borrow a razor and kept clean-shaven, which gave him a sense of dignity and, as a matter of fact, impressed the native Polynesians. He offered Tuanhita the native chief of Tuango, his services when it was time to climb the hills of the place and bring in the *fei* from the tracts. The natives thought this was quite a joke, for they themselves carry four or five full bunches of plantains down the hillsides on a long pole which was laid across the shoulder. These weights went over two hundred pounds and it did not take long for the pole to feel as if it were sawing a shoulder in half. Only the strongest of the men could stand such gaff. Indeed, it was the test of a man in the village. If he could carry down the *fei*, which is a reddish plaintain edible only when cooked, from the steepest tracts in the largest clusters with the most bunches on a pole, he was *tane*, a man. The women were interested in such things, of course, but even more so, the men, for they could see who among them could take the lead.

Tuanhita, the chief, was amused by Fraynor's request. White men were usually considered quite worthless, even the well-fed richer ones. They wore drum helmets and white suits and they sipped gin slings and slept. They did not work. Not even beachcombers worked.

So, thinking to be entertained by Fraynor's efforts, the chief gave him permission, and he personally escorted Fraynor to his own precipitous tracts on the great cliff of Kuaela. And when they returned that afternoon, Fraynor had five bunches of *fei* on his pole and he staggered into the village, exhausted, his shoulder bruised, bloody and swollen, and the women and maidens and other men stared at him in astonishment, refusing to believe that he had really carried the *fei* down. They believed however when Tuanhita said to him, "Fraynor *tane!*" Fraynor the man.

After that, Fraynor was accepted in the village with dignity and respect, and he went to live with Tuanhita who took him in as an adopted son. Tuanhita used to brag about Fraynor's feat with the old men of other islands who came to visit. "He is wonderful, this son of yours," the old men would say. "He is strong and wise. Does he have a wife?"

"Not yet," Tuanhita would say, "but being wise, he will choose one soon and I will give him fertile lands below Kuaela where he will live."

Tuanhita was very proud of him, and Fraynor did marry a native girl soon after. With Fraynor, it was no love match. She was easily the prettiest and most shapely maiden of the village, her name Manata, and it was easy to see that she was much taken by him and considered herself very lucky to have bagged Fraynor *tane*. With Fraynor, it was a marriage of convenience. Of economic convenience and physical convenience, and he treated her well. She was a *potii*, a relative of Tuanhita's, and the chief kept his word and gave to Fraynor a small tract of land below the cliff.

In the months that followed, Fraynor surprised himself. He grew tan and lean and very strong, and his face lost the look of gaunt melancholia which liquor had put

upon it. He managed to put aside a little money. He found himself watching the sea, and the white ships which put in. Amateur sailors from the states, visiting the southern seas in all sorts of fine neat vessels from small sloops to ninety-foot schooners. Fraynor watched the Gloucester fisherman which dropped her hook in the lagoon one rainy morning. Nostalgia swallowed him alive. He might have been in New England again, seeing the lines of that ship. College boys aboard her. He could have gone back with them, but he didn't.

Fraynor wanted to go back to the States more than anything in the world, but there was no point in doing it He would arrive dead broke and he would take a berth and ship out again. You had to have money to stay in the States. Easy enough to get back, it didn't cost too much. But to stay and live, that took real money.

He avoided the temptation to sail, even when the boys offered him a berth. He stayed behind.

He was at Tuango two years, two full hard endless years, and he saw his Manata bear him two children, and he saved six hundred dollars. American, not Mex.

At the end of two years, he was ready to start home. Not with six hundred dollars. That was only the stake which was going to lead him to the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. He was not going home directly. He was going home by way of the Cook Islands. From Tuango to the Cooks and then to Hilo and home. He had long heard of the man with the bag of heavenly tears and he was going to meet that man. That was why he had waited so long and been so patient.

One night, in an outrigger, with a rattan sail, Fraynor left Tuango for a one hundred and twenty mile deepwater journey to Tahiti. He saw Tuango fade astern in the lovely golden moonlight. He watched it for a time and then turned his back upon it easily and followed his course.

YOU have seen men—men like Fraynor, but in a minor way—who never let anything bother them. They are the sort of people who go through life without a conscience, cold, calculating and complete. Sometimes you envy them their *sang-froid,* for that is what it is. They can do anything they want to do, purely from selfish desire, and never feel a pang of guilt.

That was Fraynor on a grand scale. When a man is cold-blooded, nothing bothers him. It did not bother him for instance, to know that he was leaving his wife. He did not even consider that he was never to see his children again. They were quite remote and he had never felt that they were *his,* in the real sense of the word. He did not choose them; they merely happened during an enforced condition of living. This was his original plan, and he was holding to it, as he had always meant to.

Fraynor never saw Tuango again, and he had no regrets. Tuanhita had been fine to him, and he thought Tuanhita a great man. But that was all. He would never see the chief again? Very well. The memory is a wonderful thing. Manata had been very sweet and adoring, but after all, he had given her much the better side of marriage, for she could always say that a white man had been her husband and the father of her children. That wiped that ledger clean

How simple it is to rationalize!

Two years had passed since that broken-toothed jawbone of a skipper had beached him, but Fraynor knew the years had done him good. He had his health, and money, and he had learned much. The sailing of a native canoe, for instance. He remembered when he had marveled at the audacity of the natives who made long open water passages in the craft. Suicide attempts, he had once thought, yet here he was, making such a passage himself, and in serene confidence.

For after all, they were not frail craft at all. They were strong and seaworthy, built to withstand storms and blows and heavy seas. He was neither elated nor surprised when he raised the peaks of Moorea, for it was just as he planned, and he had handled his boat with as much dexterity as old Tuanhita could have managed. He made a landing at the quay in Papeete, and went about his business.

His business was to lay hands upon pearls: gorgeous, perfect pearls, the size of marbles, caught in the seas off the Cooks by the divers of Captain Elwood

Prescott. That was not going to be so easy. But he had a plan, and he would follow out the plan as one follows out a recipe. He would adhere to the plan rigidly. A maiden could make a pie by following directions, but let her ignore one part, and the thing would be ruined.

He had learned of Captain Prescott from Tuanhita one day when they swam in the lagoon to the north, with the others, diving for small seed pearls. Fraynor had got so excited about the pinhead pearls they found that Tuanhita had been amused. "You think these are pearls, *popaa?* These are *aita maitai*, mere seedlings, *fetii*. Here in the lagoon, there are no more giant pearls. They are all dived out, *aue!* But I have heard of pearls that were the tears of heaven. It has been said that once upon a time, the god Maui-the-First-Born reached into the heavens and poked the sky, and heaven cried, and these strange tears fell into the sea where the clams and mollusks and oysters ate them up. There they lay for thousands of years until this white man came. This Captain Prescott who had been told by the god Maui-the-Second-Born where the tears of heaven lay."

Fraynor was amused in turn. "What rot," he said. "You and your three gods. You left out Maui-the-Third-Born."

"He is not in this story," Tuanhita said, huffed. "And it is a true story. I myself have looked upon Captain Prescott, and I know a man called Igot, a Kanaka, who had seen the tears in the captain's own belt. Hundreds of these giant pearls, and a king's fortune which any *tinito* would give the soul he does not own, to touch."

Fraynor did not doubt it. The spidery little money-making Chinaman whom Tuanhita's people despised and made rich, would have done most anything to lay hands on such a cache. He found himself interested, remotely as yet, and he persuaded Tuanhita to tell him more.

"This Captain Prescott came to Tuango not long before I first saw you. He asked for the pearls of our own beds and promised with his boat and gear, he would get them up, and he would give us some for telling. 'Aita,' I said, 'there are none left. They are dived out by our own young men. We do not know of new beds.' And he went away."

"But what of Igot, the Kanaka?" Fraynor asked.

"Igot was a worthless man, a *ma'o*, a shark, and he stays in the west of Tahiti where he has *fee-fee*. In Papeete, you could find him easily. He himself was a diver for the great Captain Prescott, and with his own hands, he brought up heaven's tears for Captain Prescott. But he was a bad man who tried to steal a pearl, and Captain Prescott would not take him any more. But Igot told me of the pearls he had seen."

"In Papeete, did you say?"

"*E*, my son, but you would not consort with such as he who would steal pearls, and who has *fee-fee*."

"What is *fee-fee*, child of Tahiti?"

"It is a great swelling and a crookedness which comes to those who are crooked in themselves, to *ta'atas* without souls, like Chinamen."

Elephantiasis, Fraynor thought. He put it in his memory for future reference. With elephantiasis, Igot, the Kanaka would be easier to locate. And someday, Fraynor planned to locate him.

. . . When that day came, the same day that Fraynor climbed over the quay by a copra boat, which was loaded so heavily its gunwhales barely cleared the water line, he found it easy indeed. At the Hotel Mitiaria, where a Tahitian named Tuua was to be questioned as owner, Fraynor was directed to the northern district of Papeete, the *Fareute*, where he found Igot in a small native house. Fraynor was surprised. He had expected to find a monster, swollen with *fee-fee* beyond belief, for it had been months before when Tuanhita mentioned the fact.

Actually, Igot's left leg was the only part affected, and while it was oversize, it was not repugnant as yet. Igot was a crush-faced little brown man with shrewd furtive eyes.

"I come from Tuanhita and the outer islands," Fraynor said, coming to the point. "He told me of the heavenly tears, and of how you sailed and dived with Captain Prescott."

"*E*," said the Kanaka. "And so?"

"You tried to steal a pearl and lost," said Fraynor. "Come with me, and take me to Captain Prescott, and you shall have many pearls, and I, too."

"You go diving?" Igot said.

"No. I go hunting. For the tears of Captain Prescott. Only lead me to him and you shall see."

Their eyes met, and Igot understood and smiled faintly. "That will not be easy, *popaa*. Captain Prescott is a smart man, and very strong, strong as the frigate bird and big as the giant *mara*. It will not be easy."

"Bullets do not respect size and wisdom, my friend."

"You will do that for the pearls?"

"I will do that."

"Ah," said Igot, his eyes beginning to glow. "There are many of them. He does not use them up. He uses the seedlings and keeps the tears in his pouch. Always wrapped in his belt; there were a hundred. But even bullets must reach the enemy first, and Captain Prescott could shoot quick and far, and could throw a knife like a spear. Myself, I saw him fight and kill a *ma'o* with only a knife. He is very brave."

"You have only to lead me to him. I will do the rest."

Igot was pleased. "It will take money for passage. We could go to Paoli in the Cooks aboard a schooner. You must pay the passage. We cannot sail so far alone."

"I will arrange that. At the hotel, doubtless, there are captains who will be willing to take us there."

"Then I will go with you," said Igot, "if we share the pearls. There is more than enough for two. You will wish to go back to America, and I to the west."

"Done." As simple as that.

WHEN evening fell, it was the practice of the civilized folk of Papeete to gather on the veranda of the Hotel Mitiara, overlooking the lagoon and to sip Cointreau, and smell the scent of strange flowers on the cool night wind. Fraynor went here for dinner, keeping a sharp eye out for the traders and pearl buyers and the skippers.

It did not take him long to find them. They had gathered at a table and were earnestly discussing a multitude of things: a pearl which one had found at Nato; the good white wine which Tuu, the corpulent native proprietor had received from France; the price of shell; the price of copra; the plague at Manekura.

". . . Take my advice," said the hard-bitten one-eyed man whose name Fraynor heard was Captain Malloy, "and steer clear of Manekura. They've got it there, the black death. I anchored off-shore and went in in the dory, not knowing, and when I found out, I went right out again. I saw a man drop on the street. That's a terrible thing."

"Never saw it," said another man. "The black death? That's a new one on me. I've seen yaws and beri-beri and leprosy and hookworm and elephantiasis and cholera, to say nothing of the fevers, but I've never seen the black death."

"It's plague," said Captain Malloy. "Bubonic plague. I saw it once before in the Philippines way back in '12. It's the rottenest thing that ever happened to a man, barring leprosy. You get buboes under the armpits, big as apples or eggs, with purple patches over the body and horrible agony. Rats, damned filthy dirty rats full of fleas. They die too, the rats, but they carry the flea. At Manekura, they say a freighter from HongKong brought it. Rats and fleas, and the fleas carry the death."

"Is that how it works?"

"Of course. Flea takes a ride on the rat, and when the rat leaves a ship—an infected rat—he takes the flea along with him. Rats like to live close to man where they can be fed, and they bring the flea to man. The flea bites the man, and you've got plague. Black plague." He shuddered. "Keep away from Manekura until they've cleared it of rats. One rat can infect all of them. Men are dying there."

After awhile, Fraynor rose and walked diffidently over to the table. "I beg your pardon," he said, "but I couldn't help overhearing your conversation, and I take it that some of you own boats which travel among the islands. I want to get to Paoli, and pay my passage, of course."

"My name's Malloy," said the skipper, what's yours?"

"Harrigan," Fraynor replied. "Glad to meet you."

"Sit down and have a liqueur," said Captain Malloy. "I'm sailing on the tide at dawn for Paoli and the Samoans. Are you alone?"

"I have a Kanaka boy. We're going down to the Cooks to dive for pearls."

"That's Prescott's territory," said Captain Malloy. "I think he's dived it out. Well, maybe you've got some dope on a fresh bed. I hope you have luck. That'll cost you fifty dollars for the two of you. Meals and a berth and no work. That's the best I can do."

Fraynor laid his money on the table. "I'll pay you now," he said. "At dawn you say?"

Captain Malloy nodded. "That's my ship out there—the big one. She's the *Potii*. You can go aboard tonight if you want to. Tell Jim Watson I sent you out. Wait, I'll write a note. Better get out tonight so we don't miss you in the morning. Baggage?"

"I haven't any. Just essentials."

"Sure." Malloy looked at him and sighed. "Pearls. Well, when you find them, it's wonderful. But not many find them. The big ones. I wish you luck."

Fraynor and his Kanaka saw Tahiti drop astern in the gray dawn after the night was rolled aside.

HE HAD changed his name to Harrigan for a very definite reason. William Fraynor was not wanted for any crime anywhere. His own name had no *hamaa,* no stigma, nothing to be ashamed of. But when he left Paoli, he was going to be wanted, and it would be much easier to be wanted as a Harrigan than as a Fraynor.

Another thing. He planned to keep his face to himself and he did aboard the *Potii* as she worked south with the *toerau,* the northwest wind out of the constellation Orion, as the natives believed. Fraynor kept to his cabin and kept Igot in too. "Less seen the better," he said. "You have a plan, *popaa.*"

"I have," said Fraynor, "and you listen to it and get it through your heathen head. At Paoli, we separate. I'll put up at the hotel, and you take the money I give you and buy a canoe and rations and a compass. Everything we'll need for a trip to Malorai. I know, it's a long trip, two hundred miles, but we can do it in a good outrigger and you know it. The weather will be perfect this time of year. We'll ride the *toerau.* When we reach Malorai, you do as you wish, but I'll get a steamer for home."

"If you have the pearls."

"Don't be an ass. That's the point. The only man at Paoli who is going to see me enough to remember me is Captain Prescott. I'm going to proposition him about a diving bed, get his confidence, and then get those pearls. You're to have the canoe ready at a designated spot, just waiting. When it comes off, we'll sail off in the dark and be away before anyone knows a thing. They'll search the place for us, but being a white man, they'd never suspect me of reaching Malorai by outrigger. We'll be safe. Do you understand all that?"

"E," said Igot. "I understand full well."

At Paoli, they separated, to meet the first night and choose the place of rendezvous, a white beach to the west of the wharves. Then Igot disappeared, and Fraynor did not see him again until the night he, Fraynor, stabbed Captain Prescott in the back.

It was very easy. After all, you don't expect a man has come all the way from Tuango to kill you. Captain Prescott accepted Fraynor warily at first, but Fraynor's background was such as to inspire confidence. In the first place, there was the fine detailed map upon which Fraynor had worked while coming down to Paoli in the *Potii.* Fraynor had known that the map would be the ultimate selling point. He had sketched it accurately, of Tuango and the reefs, and he had special reefs marked out. Then he drew upon the past, spoke of Tuanhita, whom Prescott knew, spoke of his wife and children there, told how he had found the pearl beds but could do nothing about it, how Tuanhita had spoke to him of Prescott, how he resolved to go after Prescott and bring him back to work the beds. "I saved money to pay for use of your gear," Fraynor said, "but I knew I couldn't do it alone. So I figured it would be better to work with you and take my percentage and that in the long run, I'd make more. But there are beautiful pearls down there in the *pahau,* Captain. I've come a long way to tell you so. But Tuanhita said you were the only man to trust, and Captain Malloy who brought

me down in the *Potii* from Papeete, agreed with him."

Captain Prescott was impressed. "I'd like to think it over," he said. "You keep your map and come down to my boat tomorrow night—"

Fraynor pretended wariness.

Prescott smiled. "Afraid "I'll hijack you, Harrigan? I don't work that way. All right, I'll come to your room at the hotel, and I'll let you know. That's a long trip for a chance. I'll sleep on it."

The following night, Captain Prescott arrived at Fraynor's hotel room and sat down at the table. "I'm in," he said. "But these are the terms. Considering I provide the ship, the gear and the divers, they're honest terms. Seventy-five twenty-five. The latter is yours. Take it or leave it."

Fraynor wanted to bargain for appearance's sake. "Sixty-forty."

"I've given my terms," said Captain Prescott, "and they're my only terms. That's the way I work. Take them or leave them. Yes or no. You don't do anything but watch. You'll be a rich man. I'm one already. If I don't go, it won't mean anything to me."

"All right," said Fraynor. "Three quarters to one quarter. I guess it will have to do."

"Let's see the map."

Fraynor stood close to him on the left side and spread the map out on the table. Prescott bent over it, muttering, "You did a damned good job on this. I know those waters and this—*ugh!*"

So easy. Leaning over the table, above the seated captain. So easy to slide the knife out of his pocket and then plunge it. Like sticking pigs. Fraynor had stuck pigs in New England years and years before. He struck home then. Prescott turned his eyes up once, without much expression in them, and then slid off the chair onto the floor. The blade had reached his heart. Fraynor withdrew it when he was sure the man was dead. He wiped it on Prescott's coat and put it away. He took Prescott's gun and slipped it into his pocket. He searched Prescott and didn't find a thing on him, except for the belt.

In the belt were the most beautiful pearls he had ever seen.

He put the belt on himself, under his shirt, and then left his room and walked downstairs, after locking the door, and off into the darkness.

Igot was sitting on the edge of the canoe at the white beach, humming a song. They got in, and went off into the darkness. Nobody saw them go.

Complet!

IT HAD not occurred to Fraynor that he was not going to split with the Kanaka until he felt the weight of Prescott's pistol in his pocket. Then the thought occurred hard.

After all, Igot had fulfilled his destiny, to lead the way to Prescott, to assist in the escape. If you could kill a white man, it would be less unscrupulous to kill a common Kanaka with *fee-fee*. Fraynor frowned and wondered why he had not thought of it before. Silly omission. But the gun reminded him. At sea it would be simple to pot the beggar with a bullet and dump him over the side.

Fraynor decided to do the job on the morning of the second day when he had his full bearings. The wind held nicely, and the sail pushed them along. Better to do it as soon as possible, that would save their stores a bit.

He got the surprise of his life however, the following morning. He learned for the first time that the Kanaka had also thought of the situation from the opposite viewpoint. Igot was no fool. He had considered the possibilities of doing away with Fraynor and keeping the belt of pearls for himself. He was playing it the safe way.

Fraynor remembered that if he had not had the gun, he would have died. At dawn, he felt the boat tremble and he quickly opened his eyes to see Igot creeping along the bottom of the hull toward him with a murderous dagger in his hand.

"You filthy heathen!" he snapped.

Igot, startled, fell back a bit and instead of attempting to finish the job by hand, he let it go to remote control. He reversed the blade in his hand and raised his arm to throw it.

Fraynor hastily shot him four times and prayed the outrigger would hold its weight and not go over. It did.

Then he moved forward and dumped the body overboard, sighed with relief, took over the stern paddle for a rudder

and went on his way, the *toerau* holding well. This was the life. Everything set. Only a terrible blow could defeat him now, and it was worth the risk. He followed the small compass at his feet and held his course. Two hundred miles. Three days . . . But when five days passed, and Malorai failed to show its head above the rim of the sea, Fraynor knew that, after all, Igot had tricked him. He made certain of it when he found the piece of copper nailed beneath the compass. Igot had pulled the compass needle off with the copper just on the chance that Fraynor might get him first.

Fraynor felt crushed. He was lost. He had no idea of the knots he had averaged. Nor how far he had overshot Malorai, nor if he had overshot it at all.

It was on the eighth day, when his food and water were gone, when his wind had long since died, when his heart was dead within him, that he sighted the becalmed schooner upon the sea and paddled for it.

SHE WAS the *Ma'o,* and Fraynor recognized her because he had seen her at least three times before at Tuango when the Frenchman Dustenerry put in a boat for fresh water. He knew she was bound for Paoli because he had heard the traders on the hotel veranda there talking about her, wondering where she was. She was long overdue, and they were worried.

Well, she wasn't lost. She was becalmed. How long had she been in the doldrums? Sometimes a wind could hold away for a fortnight. It had happened.

"I can't go back to Paoli," Fraynor thought as he paddled to her. "I've got to give him a pearl to take me to Malorai, but he will. That old Frenchman would take me to hell for a pearl."

There was glue in his mouth; he had passed the cotton stage. He could barely open his lips, and when he did, it was a long and careful process, for he would have ripped the flesh if he had done it quickly. He had to keep playing his thick tongue there until the lips broke apart. It was going to be good to taste fresh water.

How big she looked, sitting on the water with her sails hanging idly on the sticks. There was not a soul on deck. He would have shouted, but he did not feel up to it, and he was certain now to reach her. He dug his paddle in, and pushed the canoe closer and closer. She loomed up like a black whale, and then he hit the hull hard in his excitement.

He split the lashings of the outrigger on his port side, but he did not care about that now. He reached up and grasped the gunwale and pulled himself on the deck where he lay a moment, panting and staring at the deck boards in an ecstasy of delight. Here he rested for a long time, turning his head finally to watch the canoe drift off with the unseen and imperceptible ocean currents.

Presently Fraynor became aware of a strange and awesome thing. No man moved aboard this ship.

He had lain on the deck boards for a quarter of an hour, at least, regaining the strength he had spent in that swift grueling dash across space to this dead ship. Where were the men who owned and sailed her, Dustenerry, and Big Fai, the mate, and the crew?

"Halloo!" Fraynor cried sharply. *"Iorana!"*

There are no echoes upon the broadness of an ocean.

Fraynor rose to his feet, fairly steadily, and balanced a moment. He looked aft, then walked to the coaming. The helm was lashed to hold the boat on the wind. But no wind. The sails were set, everything was shipshape. He felt an eeriness akin to awe.

He went amidships to Captain Dustenerry's cabin and went in. Here he had a surprise. Empty. Neat as a whisker. Bed not slept in. Or, having been slept in, it had been made. He picked up a flashlight from the desk and went below with caution. He shivered, went back, broke out a revolver, then returned below with the hammer cocked.

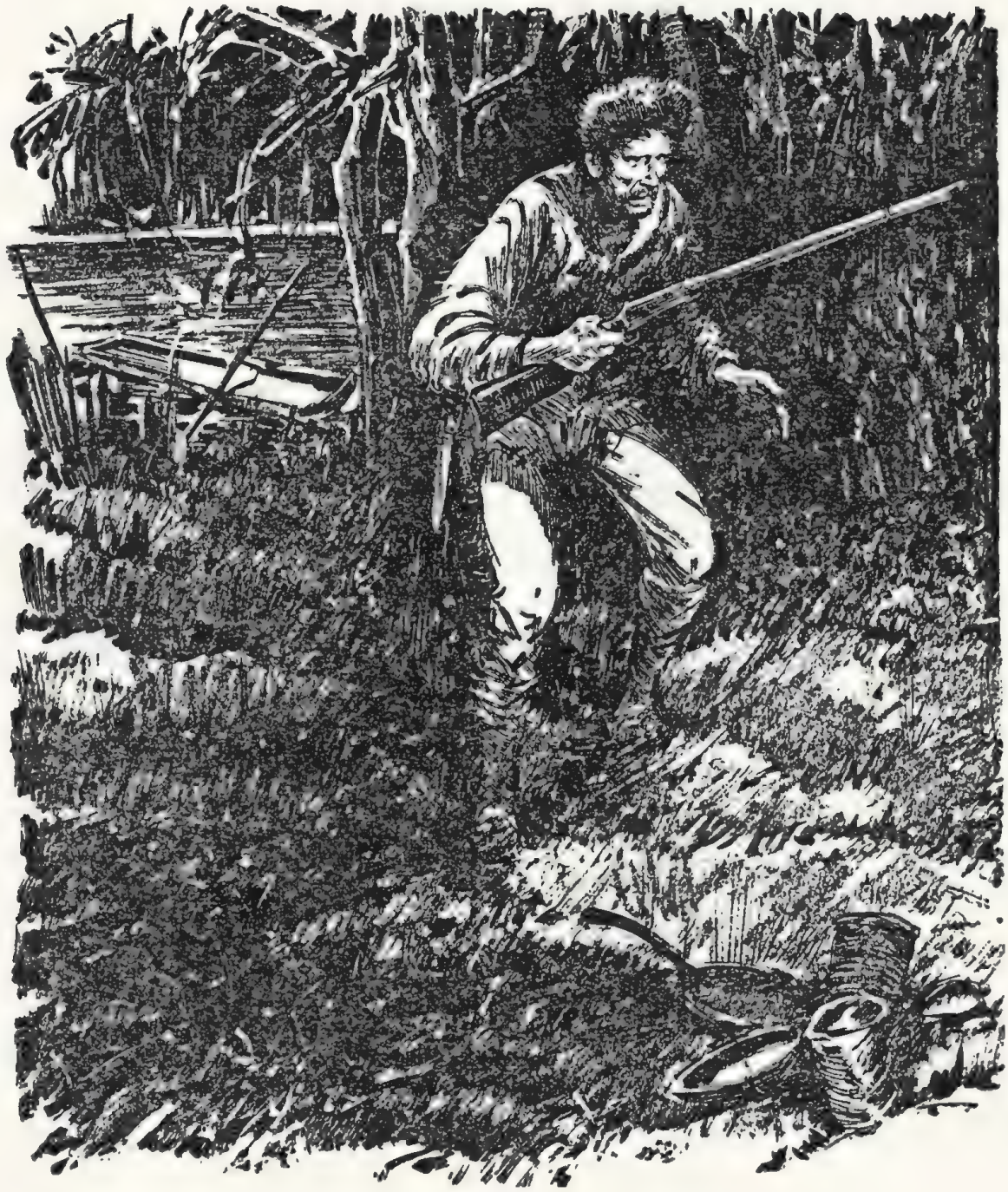
At the foot of the aft companionway, he found Dustenerry sprawled on his back, face up. Oh, very dead, very very dead, and horribly so. The Frenchman's face was black and he was a week dead if he were a second. There was a look about him which showed he had died of sickness.

Fraynor began to understand. That was

(Continued on page 128)

The Curse of

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK KRAMER



Charlie stood frozen in his tracks. . . . Outstretched on a bed of dead spruce boughs lay a headless skeleton, the bony fingers still clutching a rusted Winchester.

A FACT STORY

Dead Man's Valley

By PHILIP H. GODSELL

IT WAS from old man Beatton, Hudson's Bay factor at Fort St. John, on the rim of the Northern Rockies, that I first heard of a tropical valley in the Arctic and the search for dead men's gold. It was a weird story of prehistoric monsters disporting themselves in a tropical oasis somewhere to the northward; of a lost mine, murdered prospectors and the curse of Dead Man's Valley.

Just a few days before, the Beaver Indians had trooped in from their Rocky Mountain hunting grounds, their slat-ribbed cayuses swaying beneath smoke-stained lodge covers, dried meat, clanking copper kettles, and bales of bear and beaver skins. In no time a village of conical tepees had arisen like magic around the fort and, day and night, the valley echoed to the throb of tom-toms.

At the French fort I was busy bartering lynx and beaver pelts when the raucous

blast of the sternwheeled *Peace River's* siren reverberated back from the mountains, sending me hurrying to the river bank as she edged into the landing with fluttering pennants and jangling signal bells.

As I was sampling Captain Gullian's hospitality a tall, lean-faced man in the stiff-brimmed Stetson and blue uniform of the British Columbia Provincial Police climbed to the Texas deck.

"I'm Constable Hidson," he told me, handing me a long, official letter. "I got this from Attorney General Bowser just as I was leaving."

Bearing the British Columbia coat of arms, it told of the disappearance of Frank and Willie McLeod in the Fort Liard country to the northward and Hidson was ordered to make all possible inquiries.

"They tell me you talk Cree," Hidson smiled, "and I wonder if you would check up on these Indians here and find out what you can for me."

As Hidson embarked in a dug-out for the abandoned Mounted Police barracks across the river I made my way towards Apassassin's tepee. But the Crees weren't able to tell me anything. With the memory of ancient feuds still fresh in their minds they were afraid to venture into the hunting grounds of their Beaver enemies to the northward. Chief Montaignais of the Beavers, however, had heard of two white men supposed to have been slain by the wild Nehannies of the mountains but that was as far as his information went. Finally I dropped over to the Hudson's Bay fort to have a talk with Factor Beatton. A grizzled, irascible Orkneyman married to a Cree squaw, he'd long since adopted the primitive ways of the country and become a sort of oracle and uncrowned king amongst the motley tribesmen who traded at Fort St. John.

Seated in a couple of babiche-netted chairs with a bottle of Old Buck rum between us, Beatton answered my inquiries by unfolding a story that seemed too fantastic to be credited; a story that sounded doubly strange coming from the lips of this hard-bitten old trader who hadn't an ounce of imagination in his whole make-up. As I listened to his gruff voice I little thought that my future wanderings were destined to bring me into intimate contact with the people and places he spoke of or that, for thirty years, I would actually be enmeshed in the sinister web spun by the gods of Dead Man's Valley.

SEVEN years before, in the summer of 1904, Willie McLeod, son of the veteran Murdoch McLeod, Hudson's Bay factor at Fort Liard, four hundred miles to the northward, had sallied forth in search of gold. Raised along with his brothers—Frank, Fred and Charlie—at the lonely fort on the fringe of the Nehannie country, they'd learned to speak the tongue of this primitive tribe, and reached manhood with civilization as remote to them as to their Indian friends.

As the years slipped by the bond between the McLeod boys and the Indians deepened and Willie, after seeing a gold nugget in the medicine bag of a Nehannie, learned of rich gold deposits to the north. The location had long been an Indian secret and had been imparted to Willie only on his promise that he would never divulge it lest he bring down upon his head the curse of the Nehannies.

Inspired by the lure of fabulous wealth, Willie had failed to heed the warning. Somewhere in the nameless canyons of the Nehannie Mountains he'd made a strike and hurried south but the jealous gods that were said to guard this hoodoo gold had capsized his canoe and he'd reached Fort Liard, gaunt and emaciated, with nothing but a small bottle containing about five ounces of flake gold. The following year, in company with his brother Frank and an outsider named George T. Wade, Willie again plunged into the heart of the Nehannies.

No alarm was felt as the months slipped by without a word from them. The country was alive with moose, deer and bighorn sheep, and the McLeod's were competent woodsmen. But, as time went on, the moccasin telegraph began to carry ominous whisperings from one smoke-stained tepee to another. Hostile Indians, it was said, were roaming the Nehannie ranges, determined to allow no white men to prospect for gold, or to take it from their country!

Two years elapsed and still no word. Old Murdoch was getting anxious. Again

dark rumors flitted from one hunting lodge to another. The McLeod boys had fallen victims to these roaming redskins! Finally a band of mahogany-faced Nehannies paddled into Fort Liard and pitched their lodges beside the stockade.

As the Indians smoked their pipes in the scarlet and blue Indian Hall of the fort Murdoch learned that they'd run across Frank and Willie, and a strange white man, on their way into the Nehannie ranges over a year before. On their way back to the fort they'd come across the strange white man again. This time he was heading west across the mountains. And—he was alone!

That was as much as Mr. Beatton was able to tell me. What happened to the McLeod boys still remained a mystery. Gruffly he brushed aside Attorney General Bowser's suggestion that they might be captive among Gunnanoot's outlaw Indians and remarked *he* thought they'd been murdered. Near where the McLeod boys had disappeared, he told me, was a tropical valley that had escaped the impact of the Ice Age. A valley where, according to the Indians, living dinosaurs and monsters of a forgotten age still disported themselves in steaming pools thick with rich and luxuriant vegetation.

I remembered then that I'd heard other grizzled old traders speak of this legendary valley and tell of mammoths being exposed by the falling away of ice-cliffs to the northward leaving their flesh, when thawed, though millions of years old, still fresh enough for dog-feed.

According to old Beatton, the greatest impetus to the belief in the existence of this valley arose from a story told to a scientific party some years before by Chequina, a Cree guide. His father, a great wanderer, had found himself among a band of pagan Indians near the headwaters of the Liard River, a primitive tribe armed with bone-shod javelins and war-clubs fashioned from the jaw bones of the moose. Around their fires these Stone Age people had told of a "medicine valley" to the north, inhabited by monsters of fearful size and ferocity. On a scrap of buckskin a hunter had traced a picture of one of these creatures and this Chequina had treasured as a medicine charm. When he showed it to the scientists they were amazed to see the figure of a dinosaur sketched with remarkable detail upon it.

Leaving Beatton, I passed on the results of my investigations to the incredulous Hidson and the matter was forgotten.

It wasn't till I reached Fort Simpson, years later, on an inspection of the Hudson's Bay Company's fur forts along the two thousand mile reaches of the Mackenzie Valley that these stories came to mind again. From the lips of tawny dog-runners, bronzed canoemen and white-collared clerks of the fur company, I heard allusions to the mysterious fate of the McLeod boys; of the curse that hovered over the Nehannie Mountains, whose burnished summits pierced the clouds to the westward; and of forgotten men who'd gone off in search of the hoodoo gold only to disappear forever from human ken.

It was a lonely land, completely cut off from the outside world in winter except for the dog-teams that threaded the long white miles of frozen river and forest bringing an occasional mail from the end-of-steel at Fort McMurray. North and south, skin-clad Dog-Ribs and Slavey Indians roamed the forests, as did their ancestors, hunting the antlered moose, or toiling on webbed snowshoes beneath the ghostly scintillations of the aurora borealis to trap beaver, lynx and silver foxes and barter their pelts at the scattered forts of the Hudson's Bay Company.

January found me mushing through the snow-bound forests of the Liard country with my half-breed guide, John Robillard, and a couple of dog-teams and Indian runners. As we dug into the snowdrifts at night the cold cracked down with such bitter intensity that trees would explode, sundering the Arctic silence with reports like cannon shots. On the twelfth day out from Fort Simpson my guide crunched through the snow-mushroomed pines and pointed across the frozen Liard to a huddle of log buildings encircled with a pointed palisade.

Hardly had we hit the ice ere the scarlet banner of the "Gentlemen Adventurers" crawled slowly up the flagpole and fluttered out its salutation. Fifteen minutes later, to a pandemonium of jangling sleigh bells and excited barks, my dog-

teams cascaded into the courtyard of Fort Liard and I stepped from my red-painted carriole to shake hands with a raw-boned man in fringed buckskin, moccasins and fur cap. He was Fred McLeod, the factor, whose brothers had disappeared among those nameless peaks to the northward thirteen years before.

After a hearty supper of bighorn sheep and crisp brown bannock we adjourned to his little den, redolent of smoked buckskin and adorned with colorful porcupine quill-work. Like most of these traders who spent a life of isolation in the Indian country and didn't see a white man from one year's end to another, Fred was inclined to be tight-lipped and taciturn. Suddenly, for some reason or other, as I sat there smoking, listening to the friendly crackling of the stove and the muffled tattoo of snow on the window panes, Fred waxed loquacious. Breaking into the sibilant *patois* of the Mackenzie country, he told the story of how his brothers had succumbed to the curse of the Nehannies.

CONVINCED that Willie and Frank had met foul play when Indians reported seeing Wade, their partner, traveling west alone, Charlie had bundled up a pack, filled his cartridge belt and set out on Wade's trail. There was enough Indian blood coursing through the veins of this hardy son of the veteran Murdoch McLeod to make him doggedly persistent. Mountain ranges, swollen rivers, impenetrable muskegs, hunger and starvation only added fuel to the fire of his resolve to clean up the mystery surrounding his brothers' disappearance. The clues that led him on were broken willows here and there; fresh axe cuttings, where his quarry had chopped spruce boughs for a night shelter; charred embers of a campfire, and moccasin tracks in the muskeg.

At Indian camps deep in the heart of the Rockies Charlie learned that he was gaining. At last he found himself on the water-front at Prince Rupert where the trail he'd been following seemed to be swallowed in the green swell of the Pacific. Over a thousand miles of back-breaking toil and his only reward the sight of a few fishing boats in the inlet and a trail that led into the sea!

Mingling with fishermen and Indians, he heard of a Yukon missionary who had mushed in a few days before. A tall, wiry man seared to dark mahogany, the Reverend John Ellis told of meeting a stranger answering George Wade's description. "At Telegraph Creek I was in the store, re-fitting, on March sixteenth," he informed Charlie, "when I noticed a weird-looking man standing alone, and I detected the most foul odor coming from him. I asked the factor what the odor was. 'He just followed you down the mountains,' he replied, laughing. 'You were sure lucky to be in the lead.' I went over and spoke to the man. He acted in a peculiar manner. He would only speak in a whisper, but I discovered that his partners had died while prospecting back in the Indian country. I think his grub ran short and he beat it out. He'd shot a caribou several days before and carried the hide. He slept in the hide at night and dragged the rotting meat in it in the daytime. He must have had lots of gold dust for he bought an outfit, and the swiftest team of malemutes in the country, and next morning he was gone. But," concluded the missionary, "I've often wondered who he was."

Convinced that it was George Wade, Charlie scouted the coast to Ketchikan, Alaska, and picked up a clue that sent him hurrying to Vancouver. Weary and sick at heart, he searched the teeming coast port in vain and finally sought the seclusion of a cheap boarding house. Then, one night, came a psychic flash that Wade was in Vancouver. Perhaps it was Charlie's Indian blood that caused him to put his faith in such things. Whatever it was, with revived confidence he combed saloons and hangouts frequented by sailors, wanderers, and sourdoughs from the Silent Places till he heard of an unnamed prospector who'd made a strike among the Northern ranges and was throwing his money around like a madman.

Entering a saloon on Water Street his attention was caught by a broad-shouldered man in trail-battered Stetson leaning against the bar, bellowing to the bartender to set up drinks for the crowd. There was something vaguely familiar about the predatory nose and general cut of the man. Suddenly, as he turned on

unsteady heels, Charlie found himself gazing into the sunken blue eyes of the man he'd trailed two thousand miles. Lurching unsteadily to a secluded table, where he poured down drink after drink, Wade told, in a thick voice, of his trek into the Nehannies with Frank and Willie.

Pushing up the South Nehannie they'd been shadowed by prowling Indians. Food caches had been broken into and rifled. Twice they'd been fired on from ambush. Only *once* had they seen the redskins but they had found countless signs of where they had lurked in the underbrush near their camps. Finally, on some nameless creek, they had struck gold, and there had been another attempt on their lives which had almost proved fatal.

Short of supplies; fearful of the menace that lurked on every hand, they decided to abandon the mine and return later with a stronger party. In the shadow of the Nehannie Butte they'd divided their pokes and parted, Wade going to the coast and Frank and Willie downstream to Fort Simpson.

To Charlie the story lacked conviction. In the first place, an Indian curse lay on the Nehannie Mountains which caused the redmen to avoid that region like a plague. Secondly, the Nehannie Butte, where the men were supposed to have parted, was but a scant sixty miles from Fort Simpson, with a clear run down the Liard, and only one intervening rapid that wouldn't present the slightest difficulty to experienced canoemen like his brothers.

With Indian inscrutability Charlie masked his disbelief and stuck around with Wade until, in an unguarded moment, he dropped a clue to the location of the mine.

Reaching Edmonton by train, Charlie jumped a brigade of fur traders' carts to Athabasca Landing; worked his way to Fort Chipewyan with a north-bound flotilla and finally, by canoe, sternwheeler and scow, reached his father's fort on the Liard. Pausing only long enough to get together an outfit he plunged into the Nehannie Mountains.

Again some psychic hunch seemed to guide him in the right direction. Here and there he came upon open brush camps, evidently made by whites and not by nomad Indians. The Sickannies built long camps, hedged with spruce boughs, while the Nehannies and Slavies used the wigwam and left the skeletal poles standing. The camps he came across had spruce-bough beds to windward of the campfire, which had been kindled with cross-draft logs at either end. A lesson Willie had learned among the encampments of the Crees.

With painstaking care Charlie sifted every clue. He noted that the reddened pine needles had dropped from the boughs, indicating that the signs were nearly three years old, and that one man, evidently Wade, had been less expert than the others with the axe.

Months of tireless slogging brought Charlie at last to a willow-grown creek choked with beaver dams and over-shadowed with three red buttes. The spot described by Wade as being in the vicinity of the gold strike!

That he had nowhere seen the slightest Indian sign bore out the redskin reports that the country was taboo and recalled their superstitions that it was haunted by a race of prehistoric Troglodytes, or Nakanies, as they called them, with repulsive gargoyle-like faces who lived in caves cut from the living rock; creatures reported to be twice the size of ordinary humans who never missed a chance to carry off unwary hunters or stray squaws in their powerful, gorilla-like arms.

IT WAS a wild, untamed land. A devil's playground of snow-crowned peaks, and abysmal canyons through which roared sullen rivers. A land of awe-inspiring vastness given over to the grizzly, the antlered moose, the bighorn and the mountain goat which remains, to this day, the least explored part of the continent of North America.

Throwing a spruce-bark canoe together, Charlie poled and paddled, his eyes alert for signs. At last, through the shimmering greenery, he glimpsed the white flash of axe cuttings. With pounding heart he swung the bow in-shore and sprang out to investigate. There were axe cuttings a-plenty, while dead spruce boughs and pine needles littered the ground. His moccasined feet sinking into the spongy moss he parted the veil of greenery and stood frozen in his tracks. Outstretched on a bed of dead spruce boughs lay a

headless skeleton, the bony fingers still clutching a rusted Winchester, while, on one of them, glittered a ring he recognized as Willie's. Recovering from the shock he groped about the camp. Scattered around were rusted frying pans, a copper tea pail, a gold pan and other equipment.

Near the charred embers of a long dead campfire lay another headless skeleton shrouded in a rotting blanket. A bullet hole in the blanket showed that the man had been shot in his sleep. With shrinking fingers Charlie eased the shreds aside and identified the clothing as that of his brother Frank. A short distance away lay sluice boxes, a wooden cradle for sifting placer gold, while at the edge of a lake rose a weathered discovery post bearing Willie's name.

Burying the remains, Charlie threw himself on a fallen log and contemplated the scene before him: the spectral pines with their shaggy beards of graying moss through which the night wind sighed a mournful requiem; the star-spangled lake and the converging hills of Dead Man's Valley. Perhaps, he ruminated, the party *had* been shadowed by hostile Indians. That was not beyond the bounds of possibility for the Klondike gold rush had taught these Indians a bitter lesson as to what happened when white men discovered this yellow metal in their hunting grounds. But Wade had assuredly lied when he said he'd parted with the boys at the mouth of the South Nehannie. Gold had unquestionably been discovered then something had happened in the night. Crazed with lust for the gleaming metal, his mind peopled with the spectral figures of prowling Indians, Wade, fearful of remaining longer in the country, had crept from his blanket and shot Frank as he slept. Awakened by the shot, Willie had sprung for his Winchester only to be struck down by another murderous bullet, then Wade had decamped with all the gold. Had the boys been shot by Indians, and had Wade succeeded in escaping, he would hardly have found it necessary to concoct the story of parting with them at Nehannie Butte. Standing there, in Dead Man's Valley, beside the graves of his brothers Charlie made a fervent vow to track Wade down, no matter how long it might take, and exact his own vengeance. . . .

There was a deep silence as Fred finished his story.

"Where's Charlie now?" I asked.

"I dunno." He lit his pipe with an ember from the stove. "He couldn't settle down. All he could think of was to track Wade down. He went outside and disappeared."

Fred gazed with unseeing eyes through the blue mist of *kinni-kinnnick*. "That's a tough country where Willie and Frank died. The Injuns say it's haunted. That some old medicine man put a curse on them Nehannie Mountains. They also say there's a medicine valley up there with queer animals as big as elephants wanderin' aroun'." He rose with an embarrassed frown. "Guess I've talked too much. It's time to hit the hay."

When the chief dropped in next morning he froze the moment I mentioned Dead Man's Valley. It was *michili*, bad medicine, he said. There were evil *weetigoes* up there, giant Nakanies who lay in wait for anyone foolish enough to penetrate beyond the South Nehannie, and those who defied the curse were never seen again.

At three next morning I threw on my fringed mooseskin capote and bid Fred good-bye. It was bitterly cold as I slipped into my carriole. Stars winked in a sky of deepest violet shot with the pale green shafts of the aurora. *"Marche!"* John cracked his caribou-hide whip, there was a sudden surge, a jangling of dogbells and the sled tobogganed down to the icy surface of the Liard.

Four nights later we camped in the somber pines that fringed the base of the Nehannie Butte. Everything was as silent as the grave and it seemed that we were all alone in that world of white and silver solitude. As I gazed up at the snow-covered dome that rose in awesome grandeur sheer into the sky and caught the distant glint of the Nehannies I could almost feel, bearing down upon me, the presence of that strange power that was said to cast its curse on all who attempted to probe their hidden secrets. So intense was the silence, broken only by the occasional wail of a wolf and the mournful cry of a night owl, that my Indians gazed apprehensively about them and huddled closer to the campfire.

IT WAS at Fort Resolution, on the dismal shore of Great Slave Lake, that I next came into contact with Dead Man's Valley and its sinister associations. I was discussing the winters' trade with Pierre Mercredi, the factor. Around the palisades arose the squat caribou-skin lodges of a thousand tawny Yellow-Knife and Dog-Rib Indians in from the Land of Little Sticks to obtain the Great White Father's treaty money and barter their bear and beaver skins. Suddenly an Indian burst into the office, his swarthy face the color of dirty parchment. The throb of tom-toms had suddenly been drowned in a clamor of wolfish howls and the guttural cries of frightened Indians. Hurrying out, we found the air pulsating with a peculiar vibration. Then, from a fleecy cloud, emerged what looked like a huge dragon-fly that quickly assumed the form of an airplane, sending the Dog-Ribs leaping like jack-rabbits for the protection of their tepees.

It was the first plane Pierre had ever seen and his rugged countenance mirrored his astonishment as it settled like a duck upon the water and disgorged Captain "Doc" Oakes of the Northern Airial Minerals Exploration Company and a group of high-booted, mackinaw-clad prospectors.

"We've just organized a company to comb the North by plane for mineral prospects," 'Doc' told us. "We're hitting for Dead Man's Valley to look for that McLeod Mine. Charlie's here to guide us."

Seated on a boulder overlooking the vast expanse of Great Slave Lake I heard again, this time from the lips of Charlie McLeod himself, the story of the tragedy of Dead Man's Valley. The whir of the propeller sent him hurrying to the plane and a moment later it winged its way northward in quest of Dead Man's Valley.

Late that fall I was seated beside a crackling box-stove in the mess room at Fort Simpson. The place was crowded with Mounted Police, trappers, traders and black-robed priests who, like myself, were awaiting the return of the stern-wheeled *Distributor* from the Arctic to carry us south to Fort Smith. Suddenly the door swung open. Into the room reeled four animated skeletons in the last stages of exhaustion. Bearded and begrimed, their clothes almost torn to shreds and patched with greasy scraps of buck-skin, I recognized the human caricatures as the prospectors who had flown in in search of Dead Man's Valley.

"I thought you fellows were back among the bright lights long ago," I told Charlie after I'd revived the boys with a shot of Old Buck rum and a meal of fried moose meat.

"Huh!" Charlie grunted. " 'Doc' never showed up. We've had one *hell* of a time." Then he told of his vain quest.

Doggedly he'd searched for the little lake where he'd buried his brothers, intending to use it as a landmark, but some convulsion of nature had apparently wiped it out. Running short of gas "Doc" had dumped them somewhere among the Nehannie peaks with grub, ammunition, and a small collapsible canoe and high-tailed it back to civilization, promising to pick them up in the fall. They'd waited until long after "Doc's" plane was due but as the leaves turned to scarlet and the mountains took on the austere garb of approaching winter they looked with horror on the prospects of being marooned in that somber region with all its evil associations.

With only a small side of dried meat for rations they'd bolted their flimsy canoe together and committed themselves to the turbulent waters of some unnamed stream that hurtled to the southward. At race horse speed they were swirled along in their cockleshell craft. Rock walls closed in until the serpentine channel, twisting in hairpin turns, was crushed between rock ramparts that reared thousands of feet above them. Onward they swept over black chutes roaring through narrow chasms so deep that the sky seemed but a silver thread in the blackness that engulfed them, while the air vibrated to the roar of angry waters that spattered in their faces and half blinded them. Warned by the menacing roar of still another cascade the men scrambled ashore, barely in time, and perched precariously on a foam bespattered ledge as the river leapt a precipice and roared, in a boiling torrent, to the rocks four hundred feet below.

"All summer we searched for that

damned valley," growled Charlie with disgust, "but not a sign of it did we find. Instead, we landed right in that tropical valley them Injuns talk about. . . ."

The sudden wail of the *Distributor's* siren rent the air, sending Mounted Police and traders diving for dunnage bags and bedrolls. Stumbling, slipping and sliding down the steep bank we surged up the gangplank. Hurrying to the Texas deck I gave Captain Gardiner his orders; fur bales were trundled aboard; the red paddles began to revolve and the *Distributor* headed slowly south against the Mackenzie's mighty current on her last five hundred mile fight with approaching winter towards Fort Smith.

To the deep-throated chug-chug of the engine and the lashing of sleet upon the windows of the saloon, Charlie continued his story.

The romantic oasis, rich in tropical vegetation, was a myth, he said. Nor were there living mastodons or creatures of a forgotten age to halt their footsteps. Embedded in the rocks, however, as fresh as though made yesterday, were the footprints of giant dinosaurs and other mammoths that *had* roamed the world at the dawn of Time. Steaming mud volcanoes spluttered from grassy bottoms; boiling geysers of sulphurous water gushed from fern-strewn fissures; the air was moist and enervating, and the green moss scored with animal trails.

In their rambles they'd stumbled on a tumble-down cabin, proving that the valley had known at least one human occupant. Before the door sprawled the headless skeleton of a huge white man. Overgrown with weeds, a rusted rifle with an exploded shell in the barrel lay beside it, but all evidence of his identity had been destroyed by the packrats. Unused firewood and weathered axe-cuttings indicated that this nameless pioneer had perished at least fifteen years before. Perhaps he, too, had gone in in search of dead men's gold!

A week later I stood on the waterfront at Fort Fitzgerald and watched the last scow of the season preparing to leave for the end-of-steel, five hundred miles to the southward. Ice-pans floated on the surface of the Slave River and denuded poplars rose in stark array against the leaden sky. Pack on back, Charlie shook my hand and stumbled dejectedly up the narrow gangplank, beaten again by the brooding spirits that haunted Dead Man's Valley.

THE FACT that Charlie and his party had succeeded in penetrating the forbidden valleys of the Nehannies and come out alive seemed to break the spell that hovered over their lofty peaks and gave a new impetus to the search for the lost mine. Next to tempt Fate was Angus Hall of Meyerthorpe, a rugged prospector of some fifty years experience. Leaving Fort Simpson he and his party headed northward towards the Flat River. Nearing what he thought was Dead Man's Valley, and anxious to be the first one to reach this fabled El Dorado, he shouldered his pack and hurried on alone.

Little concern was felt by his companions when he failed to show up that night around the campfire. When day succeeded day without a sign of him they scoured the country, but in vain. Finally, with supplies running short, and believing Hall had pressed on, living off the country, they returned to Edmonton, convinced he would show up eventually. But Angus Hall did *not* show up and, two years later, he was listed by the Mounted Police as missing.

More mysterious still was the fate of Martin Jorgensen, a hard-boiled sourdough who, lured by the spell that had claimed so many others, stepped ashore at Fort Simpson from the old *Mackenzie River* and made inquiries from myself and others concerning the McLeod Mine. A genial giant of a man, he laughed to scorn the thought that any curse could hover over those peaks to the westward. From Poole Field of the Northern Trading Company he obtained an outfit. A few days later we stood at the river's edge as he loaded his canoe. "Watch the Nakanies don't get you," I warned, laughing, but Martin's reference to the reputed giants said to haunt the mountains was more expressive than polite. With a throaty laugh he dipped his paddle and swung out into the current.

Months later a wandering Slavey Indian paddled into the fort and handed Poole

Field a grease-stained note from the big miner saying he'd struck it rich. Hurriedly Poole bundled his bedroll and outfit into a canoe and hit out on his trail in company with a couple of half-breed guides. Near the Flat River, in the shadow of some nameless peak, he caught up with Martin. A headless body struck down by some mysterious killer!

Bill Powers was the next to disappear. I'd slept in his cabin on the Sickannie only a few months before when blazing a pioneer sleigh road from Fort St. John to Fort Nelson to open up trade with those pagan Indians who had given Chequina's father the picture of the dinosaur, a sleigh road destined to become the first link in the now famed Alaska Highway.

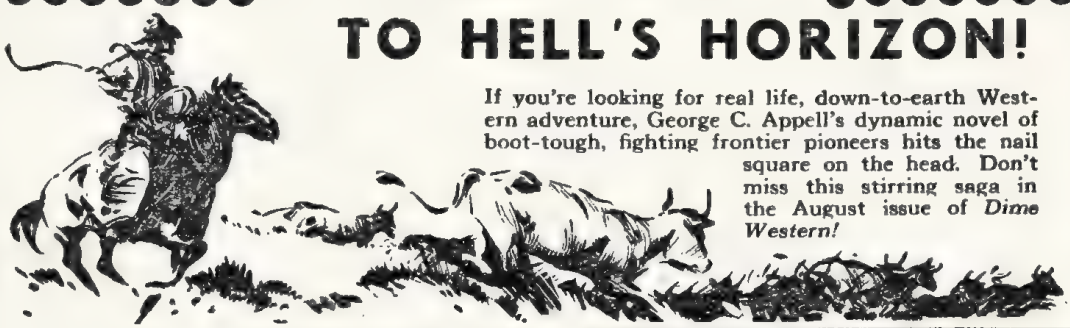
When two years elapsed without a word of the old man I reported his disappearance and a patrol, headed by Constable Clark, set out to comb the mountains. Some distance beyond the spot where Jorgensen had met sudden and mysterious death they came upon the first evidence of disaster: skeletons of lynx and foxes caught in traps that had been set but never tended. Further on they found a sawed-off .30-30 carbine and finally the charred remains of a cabin, with a human skeleton lying among the debris. In a nearby cache, untouched, reposed a prospector's outfit and grub-stake which they identified as belonging to Bill Powers.

Yet, strangely enough, though death and disaster dogged the heels of all who sought the hoodoo gold, trappers who began penetrating these virgin hunting grounds for furs alone returned unscathed. Ed Clausen, an American whose forebears risked their scalps for beaver skins in the hunting grounds of Sioux and Blackfeet, was the first white trapper to brave the mysterious terrors of the saw-toothed Nehannies and pulled into Fort Simpson the following spring, his birch-bark canoe laden to the gunwales with choice beaver, bear and other pelts.

"Them Injun's ain't so crazy as I figgered," he assured me. "I didn't see no giant cavemen but I sure as hell came across some caves. I was huntin' mountain goat when I came across one cut from the rock, halfway up the face of a hundred foot precipice that spans a valley two thousand feet across. It was about eighteen feet by twelve, with a hole runnin' right up through the rock which must have been a sort of chimney. Then I found two more that had been chiselled out by human hands." He grinned wryly. "I'd believe almost anything about that country now."

Not long ago Ed acted as guide for Dr. Wesley L. Bliss of the University of Mexico who led an expedition into the country to examine these caves which he found to be of great ethnological value.

ROLL 'EM TO HELL'S HORIZON!



If you're looking for real life, down-to-earth Western adventure, George C. Appell's dynamic novel of boot-tough, fighting frontier pioneers hits the nail square on the head. Don't miss this stirring saga in the August issue of *Dime Western!*

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In fact, the opinion is held that they will aid in confirming the theory regarding the migration of Asiatic peoples to this continent to become the Red Indians of today.

Among the prospectors who refused to acknowledge defeat was Jack Stannier, an old sourdough who'd worked a sluice-box along the nameless creeks of the Klondike. Around trading posts and cabins he talked with Indians, river pilots and trappers and learned that Father Le Guen had been at Fort Liard when the McLeod boys disappeared. Willie, it was hinted, had entrusted to his care a map showing the location of the gold strike he'd made. Paddling to Fort Providence, Stannier and the priest rummaged through countless papers, mildewed with age and tied with thongs of buckskin. Suddenly the priest uttered an exclamation. In his trembling fingers was a folded paper inscribed with the name of Willie McLeod. It was a rough map but clearly drawn upon it was the course Willie had followed in the summer of 1904. A serpentine line marked the Flat River while, some seventy miles to the west, was a pencilled cross marked with the magic word *Gold.*

Hiring Stan MacMillan of the Mackenzie Air Services, Stannier blazed yet another air trail over the snow-capped peaks and canyons of the Nehannies and descended on the emerald waters of an unnamed lake. Leaving the plane they scaled hills and descended into mist-dimmed valleys till they came on a sight that sent the blood pounding through their veins. It was just a narrow stream but scattered about were rusted gold pans, picks, shovels and rotting sluice-boxes, just as they'd been left by the McLeod boys over three decades before. Seizing a pan, Stannier scooped up sand from the creek bed and swirled it with a gentle rotating motion. "We've found it!" His voice was thick with emotion. The dull gleam of minute particles of gold met the pilot's eyes. "Boy! We've found it. The lost McLeod Mine *at last!*"

But, again, the malign gods of the forbidden valleys laughed. Stannier had merely stumbled across an outlying camp. The mother lode was as far away as ever. In vain he scoured the hills and valleys until, finally, broken in health he returned to Edmonton.

RECENTLY the curse of Dead Man's Valley claimed still another victim. Ollie Holmberg, a well-known miner around the camps of Great Bear Lake and Yellowknife, left Fort Simpson and plunged into the Nehannies. When the period elapsed when he was due to report at Fort Simpson on his way Outside the Mounted Police took up the search but were forced to return without finding a single trace of the strapping, good-natured Ollie.

Today the mystery of the headless men, and the source of the hidden gold, is still one of the Northland's secrets but the fate of the murderer of the McLeod boys is no longer a secret.

"I caught up with Wade at last," Charlie told me not long ago. "Found him working under another name on a railroad outside Edmonton."

Then I learned that, after a lapse of thirty years, Charlie had made good his vow and exacted his own peculiar form of vengeance.

Finding himself discovered, tormented by the memory of his crime and fearful that Charlie would turn him over to the hangman, Wade fled to a small farm near the Saskatchewan border. It was a lonely place, half a mile back from the road, and commanded a clear view in all directions. As Charlie approached the place one day a figure broke from the shack and ran for a hayrick. As flames and spirals of yellow smoke began to lick around it the man climbed to the top. Realizing the other's desperate intention Charlie sprinted forward and up the ladder as a muffled shot rang out.

Snatching the scorched and smoking clothing Charlie tumbled the body to the ground and gazed at the gaunt dead face of Wade.

A pair of field glasses and a pile of cigarette stubs near the window inside the building told their own story only too clearly. Wade had spent every waking hour watching the roadway in an agony of suspense.

"I spoke to him many times," Charlie admitted, "and he confessed everything, but any vengeance I could have taken would have been nothing compared to the hell he had endured."

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

NEW recruits for the Writers' Brigade, new experts for the "Ask Adventure" roster, some interesting sidelights on the yarns in this issue, and a special announcement to our readers—it's a crowded *Camp-Fire* this month, so we'll just stand back and watch the blaze build up . . . First let's hear from Joseph Chadwick who wrote the action-charged novelette about alien smuggling along the Mexican Border—

"Bait for the Man-Trap" is the result of some research I've been doing on alien smuggling across the Arizona-Sonora border of a half century ago. Compared to this traffic in human contraband, cattle rustling and horse-stealing stacked up as pretty tame pursuits. It was a profitable business for white renegades—and often a bloody one for the people being run into the United States by way of Mexico.

The smugglers handled some Japanese and Hindus, but Chinese in far greater numbers. They usually followed isolated and tortuous desert trails; one main route was by way of Altar to Sonoita and across the wasteland to Wellton or Gila Bend, while another followed the old mule trails from Cananea, traversed the San Pedro Valley, ending at Fairbank or Tombstone or even as far north as Globe.

The smugglers were usually paid by the "Six Companies"—six business and fraternal organizations to which most American Chinese belonged—and more often than not *los contrabandistos*, as the Mexicans called them, collected their pay in advance.

With his fee in his pocket, the smuggler worried little if something went wrong. That is, if a lawman crossed his trail. He had merely to abandon his charges and to disappear, to be safe. Or he could destroy the evidence of his smuggling.

To be abandoned on the desert was almost certain death for the Chinese. The pigtailed little men were helpless when left to shift for themselves, and death by thirst and hunger was a harder way of dying than by a bullet or a knife.

Sixteen Chinese were killed and thrown in a well in Ephraim Canyon by a smuggler band headed by one Charlie Hood, who had collected a hundred dollars each for bringing them across the border. Another smuggler, a Corsican named Saponaris, was notorious for killing Chinese—and to make sure none should escape, if he took the notion to murder them, he never moved them a step along the way until he bound their hands . . . Thousands of Chinese made it safely across the border, and certainly some hundreds died on the desert or were murdered.

There was no Border Patrol in those days, and the Immigration Service had far too few officers to check the smuggling. The Immigration Inspectors worked out of such towns as Nogales—but not too far out. In 1904 the famed lawman Jeff Milton was appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt as a "line rider" for the Service. He was known at first as the Mounted Chinese Inspector, and later became an Immigration Inspector. Jeff Milton was really a one-man Border Patrol, and he rode the line along Sonora and also along Baja California. He was paid seven dollars a day for this dangerous job, and had to furnish his

own horses, guns, and gear. He captured smugglers; he fought and killed others. He captured countless Chinese for deportation. He was always in danger of an ambush bullet—and his friends urged him not to eat in Chinese restaurants, warning him against poison. And he was forever being offered tempting bribes.

Milton, during the early 1900's, was rated the best shot in Arizona Territory. Certainly he was one of the most fearless men who ever packed a six-gun . . . I've tried to make my hero in "Bait for the Man-Trap" a fictional Jeff Milton, though the real man was the hero of far too fantastic exploits to be believable as a story character.

Personally, I've just reached the age where life is supposed to begin. I became a writer back in '35, when one couldn't shelter, feed and clothe a wife and son on the wages paid by the few jobs open in those depression days. My first stories were written for newspaper syndicates, serials running to as many as thirty-six installments. I covered the world with adventure serials having such exotic backgrounds as Africa, India, China, the South Seas, the Balkans, etc.

The formula was a simple one: I took for my background whatever part of the world happened to be in the headlines when I was about to begin a story . . . If the editors or the people who read the yarns suspected the truth, that I'd never visited any of the places I was writing about, they were kind enough not to complain.

I also wrote dozens of detective serials and quite a few love serials, one of the latter being extravagantly plugged as "the most beautiful love story of the year." So help me, it was written from the heroine's viewpoint. A nice trick, for anybody but a woman writer.

Seven or eight years ago I smartened up and switched over to the Westerns, where I'm happy and hope to stay. There is really nothing like a Western story; it can have everything—adventure, romance, mystery, a bit of historical flavor, and it's as American as the Stars and Stripes.

My first novel is soon to be published, and Gene Autry's latest picture, "Rim of the Canyon," is based on a story of mine.

FOLLOWING *Camp-Fire* custom, Halley G. Gates rises to introduce himself to you on the occasion of his first story for *Adventure* ("Raid by Torchlight"—page 86). He writes from Valdez, Alaska—

Background of "Raid by Torchlight" is an historic incident I first learned up here this last skiing season—which is a whole year except in the all day long sunshine weeks of summer. It's a yarn all the Norwegians here and in the old country are fond of, but so far no Finn I know up here has been acquainted with it. It was told me by Anius Ossander who travels around with his troubadour son, Ivar—better known from Kotzebue to Ketchikan as "Ho-Bo-Jo, the Accordion Maestro."

The kernel of the story is true, the incident of the Finn who made the raiding Swedes follow his torch out into space and death and so saved a Norwegian fishing village. But the Norwegians insist it was 300 and not 30 who thus died in a cataract of bodies. The bigger the tally the better, they seem to think in Norse legends, as who doesn't? To some of us on the ski slopes 300 seemed both an exaggeration and implausible—for the yells of the first victims could presumably have warned the rest, following in single file, even at great speed. So I divided by ten as I do every fisherman's story except of course when he's talking about our huge Alaskan rainbow trout.

Exact date of the incident is obscure but could have been in the eighth century when, I am told, Christianity was supplanting worship of the old pagan gods of the North and some burly clansmen were opposed and termed the new order effete.

Of course no one will ask as one listener did, "What, no ski poles?" They were scorned then as they are today by north country mountain troops in Europe, as much ruled out as in ski jumps anywhere. They just stayed up on the "runners" or went schussing with their noses.

If Donald Barr Chidsey sees this, hello! Haven't seen him since we were slaves together on the staff of the Elizabeth (N.J.) *Times*. Didn't in fact see the *Times* after I filled the telegraph editor's corncob pipe with a pinch of flashlight powder (that'll date me) and it blew up right after he saw a good Page One story on the teletype and called out to the city editor, "Oh Mitch, here's a hot one!" The *Times* didn't see the victim either for three days but a corner establishment that wasn't supposed to exist did, so Chidsey later reported.

About myself? The late Frank Blighton, old-time contributor to *Adventure* first broke me into newspaper work (broke is right) and magazine writing. But I knew *Adventure* before that. Borrowing a .32 revolver with two-inch barrel and pearl handle my Dad gave my Mother I was curious how far a bullet would penetrate and what the impact would do. I found out and so did the pile of *Adventures*. Did that slug mushroom! It spoiled some good stories my brother wanted to re-read and I was spoiled for sitting down comfortably. But right there began a serious study of ballistics and the research has continued on big animals in Alaska.

Education? Columbia, and Heidelberg, Germany when Hitler was up and coming. Remember him? It got so they even wanted American students to take the Fascist oath! Hobbies? Hunting, fishing, cooking and roughing it generally.

Other jobs: Was in Merchant Marine

pushing high-test gas around. On passenger ships going to Europe earned way lecturing on countries I hadn't yet then visited. Have been longshoreman in Alaska. And lived (and starved) in the Alaskan wilderness. And everything in newspaper work from police reporter to publisher. Last job, Manager of Alaska Bureau, the United Press. Now free-lancing.

It's a great country but tell Bill Gianella that his directions on how to raise and pamper pedigreed fish worms were meaningless in Alaska until some were discovered in Anchorage. And yesterday (banner headline news) I found one in front of cabin in Valdez but an April freeze got him. Must have stowed away in a flower pot from the States.

PERRY ADAMS has a few pertinent words to say about the origin of his tale of the India Frontier—"The Big Run" (page 56)—

As you know, people are always asking writers where their ideas come from. No approach is more maddening: Mostly, one simply doesn't know. In the case of this story, as it happens, I *do* know.

Once, before I was commissioned—it was while I was still with the East Surreys on the Frontier—our company was suddenly ordered to turn in its rifles to the armorer for a more careful inspection than can possibly be made by an officer, on parade. The next day, while our Lee Enfields were still in Q.M. stores, the battalion was ordered out on the electrified wire that used to run all the way from Michni to Abazai. The rifles were handed back to us in a hurry—any rifle to any man, with orders to get together somehow and match up men and serial numbers as they showed in the rifle book. We did this—but with a somewhat cockeyed mind like mine, I began wondering, then and there, over the possibilities, in that sector where a rifle is so much more important than its bearer that they speak of so many Officers, N.C.O.'s and *rifles*—I began to wonder about all the things that could happen to arms and the man if the two were not linked by definite record. This speculation gave me the climax of "The Big Run"—and the painfully rapid backtracking taking place throughout the yarn (from which obviously it derives title) is the upshot of several such harrowing experiences. Put climax and sprinting across that desolate country together—and you have "The Big Run."

They run no more there—and more's the pity!

'WAY back in December '48, we published, in the Ask Adventure Department, Phil Godsell's reply to a query about the Lost McLeod Mine, somewhere north of Fort Liard in the Mackenzie District of Canada. That brief account elicited so many comments from readers that Mr. Godsell decided to write down the whole story. It is presented in this issue under the title of "The Curse of Dead Man's Valley." Below, the author gives us a dramatic sidelight on his account of the fate of the McLeod brothers—

Since I wrote that letter in "Ask Adventure," referring to the Lost McLeod Mine in Dead Man's Valley over a year ago I have, as you know, received a great many inquiries from readers concerning the story. Some I have replied to through the magazine and others direct.

Incidentally, some time ago I published a short version of this in *Scarlet and Gold*, official organ of the North West Mounted Police Veterans Association, and am enclosing an excerpt from a letter received from the brother of one of the headless victims of the so-called Curse of the Nehannies.

Excerpt from letter received from John A. Vatne, 22 South Nanaimo St., Vancouver, British Columbia.

"Mr. Philip Godsell:—
Dear Sir:

With the kind co-operation of Mr. A. A. Brookhouse of the Royal North West Mounted Police Veterans Association of this city I hereby take the liberty of making an inquiry, knowing that you are perhaps the only person who can clarify a mystery that has haunted our family for twenty-eight years. Unbeknown to yourself you have already cleared up the mystery.

Allow me to explain. Only last Saturday I accidentally came across a copy of the North West Mounted Police official journal, *Scarlet and Gold*. With keen interest I read your account of Dead Man's Valley. Suddenly I became literally transfixed at the words "Jorgensen strikes it rich." It was with mingled suspense and horror that I finally came across the facts relating to the disappearance of my long-lost brother. The victim you describe as Jorgensen (Martin was his name) was my brother, even though my name, as signed hereto, would not indicate so.

We knew Martin had outfitted in Winnipeg and set out in the wilderness in search of the yellow metal. Years passed with no news. Rumors, as brought out by sourdoughs and travellers, reached us; one rumor contradicting another, leaving us in a painful state of uncertainty.

Our oldest brother here in Vancouver, another at Wolverton, Minnesota, and a sister at the same place, seemed to expect me to try and dig up some record or news of our brother. You

will no doubt realize what a hopeless task this has been.

Now I know we are on the right track as Mr. Brookhouse showed me a copy of *Scarlet and Gold* containing the same account by you and we very well know that any records of the former R.N.W.M. Police are the only dependable records out here in a new country. Mr. Brookhouse explained that you had been largely responsible in investigating some of the mysteries of the North country and filing your reports with Mounted Police headquarters. I feel quite sure that you can, and will, be kind enough to elaborate on this report a little further than could be done in a short article for publication . . .

May I explain the difference in names? When I was a baby our mother died and I was adopted into another household whose name I have since retained. That was near Cooperstown, North Dakota. I am fifty years of age, ex-serviceman with the American Expeditionary Force, and past Commander of the local Outpost, American Legion.

Thanking you in advance, I am

Respectfully yours

(Signed) John A. Vatne."

Note by P. H. Godsell:—The author was in a position to furnish this gentleman and his family with all the information requested.

THREE very welcome newcomers to our Ask Adventure panel of experts—a doctor, a retired Air Force colonel and a globetrotting travel writer. The first is no stranger to those of you who have read his fact stories, which have appeared in these pages in recent months. And you will find another of his colorful pieces on piracy in this issue ("Tiger of the Caribbean"—page 50). He is Dr. Charles H. Knickerbocker, who will handle queries on famous pirates and buccaneers of history. That ought to turn up some fascinating lore, for the doctor has made a thorough study of these bloody rogues.

The next two men will introduce themselves to you. Colonel Roland Birnn will replace the late Raymond S. Spears as our expert on Small Boating. And he will double in brass (no pun intended, Colonel!) as geographical expert on Chesapeake Bay and Tributaries, and inland waterways, New York to Florida. Here he gives us a brief biographical sketch—

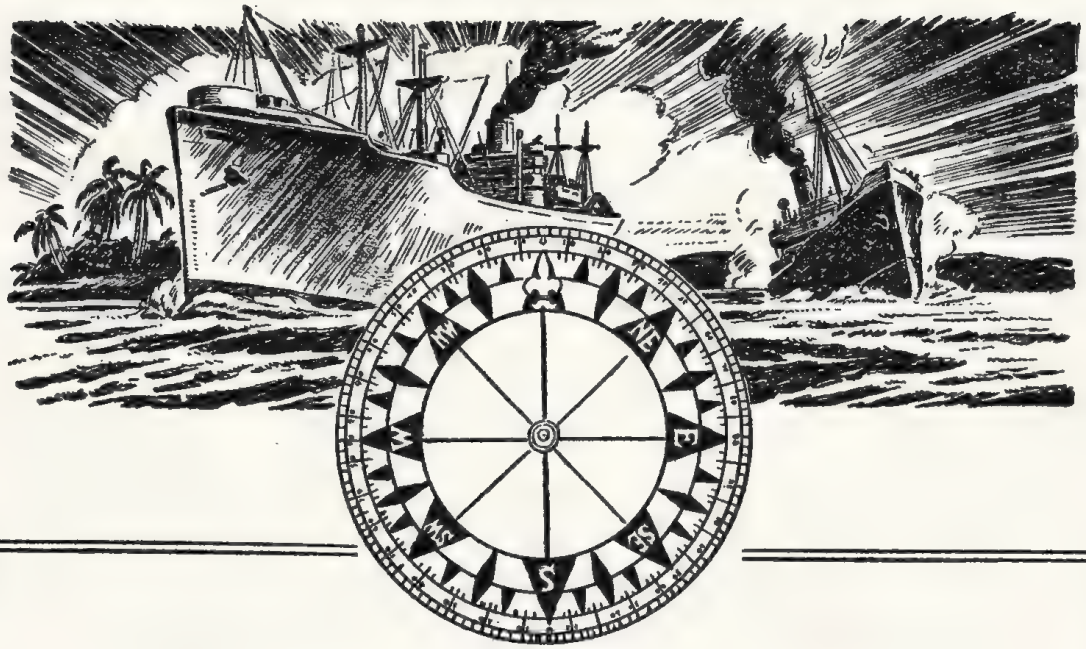
Retired regular Air Force officer and command pilot. Hobby has always been boats and sailing. Contributing Editor to *The Chesapeake Skipper* and regular contributor to *Motor Boat* and other yachting magazines, sometimes writing under the name of "Abel Brown." Member: Outdoor Writers Ass'n of America, Chesapeake Bay Yacht Racing Ass'n, Capital Yacht Club. Cruised and sailed extensively in U.S. and many parts of the world. Been reading *Adventure* since first issue—1912? [Pretty close, it was Nov. 1910—Ed.]—and still have a Colcord Huerlin original painting for a cover sheet of a 1923 *Adventure*, and many pleasant memories of encountering *Adventure* in faraway places. Since retirement, my wife (The Mate) and I spend Summers and Falls cruising the Chesapeake and other East Coast waters in our 31-foot cruiser. Winters in Florida feverishly writing about past season's cruising and drawing more plans for the yet-to-be-realized "dream boat" which will be a 33-foot cutter or ketch built to go anywhere in comparative comfort, and to be handled single handed, with maybe some vocal encouragement from The Mate. Springtime spent slaving away getting cruiser in commission. If letters received in Spring smell of paint, varnish and mahogany, they will have been written in deckhouse of good ship *Star Dust*, amidst a hurrah's nest of scrapers and paint brushes.

The third man on the roster is Norman D. Ford. Under his able direction, we are reviving an old and popular A.A. department: *Globetrotting and Vagabonding*. Mr. Ford—an ex-Britisher, now an American citizen—has travelled in twenty-eight countries and written several books on travel. But let's let him tell it himself—

Before I had finished school, in England, the urge to travel had led me to explore most of Europe—and since then, I have been able to cover most of the world by taking advantage of opportunities for low cost globetrotting. I have travelled in twenty-eight different countries, mainly by hiking or bicycling. The first three war years, I served in the Royal Navy; the last three as a merchant marine radio operator in the Atlantic, Mediterranean and Pacific. Later, I was mate of a three-masted schooner, and skipper of my own deep-sea yawl. In 1947, I came to the U.S.A. and after making several trips to the Far East, became an American citizen.

Nowadays, the possibilities for adventurous journeys in foreign lands on very low budgets are tremendous for Americans due to the strong buying power of the dollar. Dollar-hungry countries are doing everything they can to entice Americans to travel in them and restrictions are now at a minimum. In Austria, Peru and some West Indian islands—to name just three—the dol-

(Continued on page 127)



THE TRAIL AHEAD

Now en route and heading your way! . . . The good ship *ADVENTURE* will dock on schedule at her regular pier next month, bringing you a choice cargo from the far ports of the world. Here's a look at her manifest—

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THE RUBBER MONKEY

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By GEORGE C. APPELL

PLUS—*THE ADVENTURE CLASSIC OF THE MONTH:*

BORN TO FIGHT

A Tale of the French Foreign Legion

By GEORGES SURDEZ

In the same issue: A pair of unusually interesting fact stories—"Letter from a Bronc-Peeler" by Cull Bertson, and "Weapons of the Samurai" by Robert H. Rankin . . . "Salt-Water Duel," a colorful story of the swordfishing fleets, by John Scott Douglas . . . Many other exciting yarns and a generous measure of the unique features and departments you find each month in—

ON SALE AUGUST 9th

ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

ROAMING the South Seas.

Query:—I am a retired doctor, 50, white, weigh 145, perfect health, love the tropics, a good cook, and have worked my way about a bit as such, also as a wheeler.

In the near future I intend to spend a year or more in the islands of the South Seas. Just roaming about, writing, treating the natives where there is no doctor, with no intent or need to make money, other than such things as they may wish to give me, as I have an income sufficient to live, as I do not drink or smoke. From somewhere on the West coast I will ship on a tramp steamer to Papeete, Tahiti, thence wherever fancy or rumor may lead either on some fishing boat or one of my own, depending on your answer. I shall collect rare items for museums also. But there are are a lot of questions before I start—

Since many of these islands are in French, Australian, English, etc., mandate—shall I get a general United States passport? What vaccinations, inoculations do I need? What ailments or diseases are most prevalent in the small out-of-the-way islands? I shall carry a small microscope but few instruments and only emergency medicine, is that correct? Will I be allowed to trade merchandise (not guns or dope or liquor) with the natives? What type of clothing do I need? Does it get cold at night? Would I have any use for a .30-30 Winchester, is there any hunting, or could I get it at some Government store on Samoa, or other? Would you recommend I take my .38 S&W six-gun, or is it unlawful to possess firearms in some of the islands? If it is I would not take it.

I want to carry just the bare necessities when I travel from the States to Tahiti. Anything I can buy there as cheaply as here I will not carry. What is the average cost per day for food in the islands? I live mostly on fruit and vegetables, here, and all kinds of sea food. I will visit Samoa, Gilberts, Strong, Cook, Hebrides, Australia, Tasmania, Philippines, and as many more as I shall have time and desire, as I am a mining engineer and will hunt for treasure on Suvorov, and other places legended to have been pirate stopping grounds, and while I may not find gold coins there, I may find material for a story. I am single and my time is my own.

Can you give me some idea of the cost of a sailing boat just big enough to be seaworthy about the islands? What does it cost to tie up at the ports approximately, per day? These and anything else that you will be so kind as to tell me will be greatly-appreciated.

—Frank N. Perrin
Ojus, Florida

Reply by William McCreadie:—The best clothing is a light khaki with perhaps a coat and pants of white drill for special occasions. It is rather cool at night in July and August. The rainy season starts in November and what is known as the "hurricane season" from November to April.

You can buy a Winchester in Papeete, Apia, Suva. Better not take a 6-shooter. Little hunting—maybe wild pig. Cost of fruit and vegetables has risen since the war but still cheap and a dollar will go a long way. Banks will always cash travelers cheques.

The cost of a boat is difficult to estimate but you need a good stout one as there is plenty of rough weather in the Pacific. Can't imagine success in hunting pirate hoards,

but Fiji (Viti Levu) offers good chances in prospecting, very rich reefs being worked now in the north.

A general U.S. passport will do and I also advise certificate of character and one of health, just in case. It is likely that you will be asked to deposit cash in French and British dominions. All islands east of New Hebrides, Solomons, and New Caledonia are full of malaria. New Guinea and the Philippines have it and blackwater fever. I don't think there will be any fee for tying up but things are very different since after the war. The French welcome writers so make the most of that aspect.

FLORIDA stock whips.

Query:—I would appreciate all the information you can give me on the Florida stock whip. I understand whips are widely used there, and I would like to find out where to buy them, approximate cost, average length used in Florida and if possible the reason for their use. I understand the Florida cattle country is what we would call bush, and I would think a whip rather troublesome.

—Don Calkins
Alberta, Can.

Reply by Hapsburg Liebe:—There's this about a Florida stock whip. The handle is very short, around 15 to 18 inches, and the whip proper fits into the handle with a ball-and-socket arrangement. On the small end of the lash there is a "cracker," some 8 to 10 inches, rawhide, which is where the wear is principally. The cracker is about ¼ to ⅜th inch wide and fits on with a split loop. The whip can be made to crack like a .45 6-shooter. It will split a steer's hide, and, I'm told, can take a snake's head off. Some years ago I visited the 7K ranch (seven Kersey brothers) in Pasco County above here, and a cowboy there had a whip with a 22-foot lash, which was the longest I've seen. He was slick with the whip, let me tell you. Swore he could take a cigarette out of my mouth and never touch me—I just took his word for that! Most of these whips that I've seen had lashes from 15 to 18 feet long.

Time is required for learning to handle them. It is a bit like fly-casting. Toss the lash out full length in front, make a back cast, wait until the lash is out full length behind before making the "strike." The whip is used mostly for turning a cow. The sound of the *crack* does it, as a rule. Cow dogs are used a good deal here, on "cow hunts." Florida cowboys don't always carry ropes. But the handiest man with a rope I ever saw was a Florida cowboy. He was a marvel and no mistake. I made a feature movie with him in the 1920's.

Yes, our cow country is largely bush. The boys as a rule wear high, laced boots, with flat heels. Those who carry guns favor the old single-action Colt, as a rule, as the West does. Florida has the greatest cow population of any state, except Texas. There are more Hereford (whiteface) cows east of the Mississippi than west of it, according to an El Paso paper I saw recently. Black Angus is also a favorite breed here. Also we have lots of big Brahmans.

WILD plant cookery.

Query:—I have heard that there are many so-called weeds that are really valuable as food. I would like to know what wild edible plants grow in this section of the country (Northeastern Arkansas) and how to prepare them on camping trips. Could you give me any information concerning this and/or tell me where I might obtain some book on the cookery of wild plants.

—Dan Marsh
Jonesboro, Arkansas

Reply by Paul M. Fink:—The woods are full of many plants that one may use to sustain life, but I doubt the wisdom of starting a camping trip, depending on them for food instead of taking a well filled grub sack from home. It can be done as a stunt, though, and a friend here had offered to bet me he can live indefinitely in the mountains near here, with no prepared foods whatsoever. The flora of your region is just about the same as it is here, so you are most likely to find the same wild foods we can.

All the oak trees give acorns, used by the Indians as one of their principal breadstuffs. The white oaks, such as white, basket, post and chestnut oak, are better than the black and red oak group, as their acorns contain less bitter tannin. The acorns are hulled and dried, then ground into a fine meal and leached with fresh water to remove the tannin. If in a hurry, they can be boiled or roasted for the same purpose. The resulting dough can be boiled into mush or baked into cakes as bread.

All the nut trees, walnut, chestnut, beech, hickory, etc., yield a cooking oil. Pound the kernels and boil, skimming off the oil.

The roots of arrowhead, cattail, bulrush, pond lily and similar plants are edible, boiled or roasted, or dried and then pounded into flour. Even the highly acrid Indian turnip or Jack-in-the pulpit can be eaten after being well baked or boiled. The wild sweet potato or "man-of-the-earth" has enormous roots weighing twenty pounds or more that are edible after roasting or boiling.

The tender young leaves of many wild plants supply succulent greens or salad. Among these are dandelion, chicory, mustard, burdock, poke-week, plantain and curled dock. The tender young shoots or "fiddleheads" of bracken or other fern boiled in salted water are considered an excellent substitute for asparagus.

Wild onions and leeks are edible either raw or boiled. Many mushrooms are considered delicacies, but watch your step there. Some are poisonous, deadly so, and if you are not "certain sure" leave the whole tribe severely alone. Possibly in marshes or swamps you can find wild rice, a close cousin of the cultivated variety. It was one of the big foods of many tribes of Indians. Dried and husked, it is cooked very much like that bought in stores, with a richer, more nutty taste.

Drinks can be made from the roots of the sassafras, the bark and twigs of black birch and the leaves of the wintergreen. Sugar, of course, can be made in the late Winter and Spring by boiling down the sap of the maple tree. Hard or sugar maple is best, with the other kinds yielding sugar in less quantities.

I do not know of any book that specializes in recipes for cooking these wild foods. "Camping & Woodcraft," by Horace Kephart, devotes a little space to them, as does "How to Survive on Land and Sea," published by the U. S. Naval Institute, Annapolis, Md. The Department of Agriculture isses a pamphlet on plant foods of the Indians. My copy has been mislaid, but as I remember it solely lists the plant by name and location found, and says nothing about method of preparation.

THE Kenya Police.

Query:—I wish information concerning Kenya, but not of a geographical nature. In a recent book, "Last Chance In Africa" by Negley Farson, the author states that there may eventually be in the Northern Frontier District of Kenya a British counterpart to the French Foreign Legion. Have any definite decisions been made in this respect?

The Kenya Police is where my real interest lies—any bit of information about this force; its history, duties, administration, members, recruiting methods, would be most welcome.

—Lawson C. Stockford
St. John, N. B.

Reply by Gordon MacCreagh: — The Kenya police has little resemblance to the Foreign Legion; perhaps the only one being that you do not have to be a citizen of the colony to enlist in it. The force is by no means a refuge for every Tom, Dirk and Heinrich with no questions asked. The British, in all their colonial policies, have always been keenly conscious—perhaps hyper-conscious—of "white man prestige." Bums, crooks, misfits, have always been discreetly hustled out—even deported. Unless, of course, colonial citizens who can't be deported. Too close fraternization is frowned at. Mixed—let us call it marriage —is tabu.

Accordingly the *standard* demanded of recruits is high. The force has a excellent reputation; the work is analogous to that of the Canadian Mounted, in that a vast territory is covered, only in warm country rather than cold. The standard of living —accommodations, social prestge, food—is high.

Why not write to J. W. MacIntosh, Chief of Police, Nairobi—or perhaps, better, just Chief of Police, since I don't know whether Mac I. is still there. Ask for the latest lowdown on requirements. He'll tell you, too, about U.S.A. (Union of South Africa) requirements. There's a swell bunch there too and some lovely climate. Send an international reply coupon for quick reply and save time by giving all your own physical and educational set up.

SILK tents.

Query:—I wonder if you could send me any information regarding silk tents. When possible I spend two or three weeks each summer on canoeing and fishing trips. Have always used canvas tents but find them bulky and heavy especially on long portages. Also have a treated nylon tent which sweats and gets very wet on the inside. Thought perhaps you would be able to tell me something about silk tents—do they sweat like the nylon, are they waterproof, will they stand the normal wear and tear of a camp-trip or must they be handled with "kid gloves"?

I have been unable to get much information regarding these tents in this district except in sporting goods stores. There, of course, the information was all manufacturers' advertising which is not always reliable. I understand that many prospectors use this kind of tent as they are light and easy to pack. Would you tell me what you think of them and suggest a place where they can be purchased.

—K. R. McKenzie
Fort William, Ontario

Reply by H. S. M. Kemp:—I've not had a great deal experience with silk tents, but I've certainly never noticed nor heard of the sweating you mention. And I've never heard of nylon tents sweating, for the reason I've yet to use one.

However, I have a friend who is a Reserve Army officer who has been on various winter exercises. He agrees with me that the silk tent will not sweat, and with you to the extent of saying the nylon tent does. He'll go even further than that by saying that what goes for the tent goes for the nylon parachute; and being an ex-para-trooper, he ought to know. Tents and parachutes of nylon sweat badly, and for that reason, if he were buying a tent for pleasure, he'd buy only silk.

I don't think you need worry unduly over wear-and-tear. You have to look after

any tent; and those of silk I used I treated with no more than average care. Of course, you can sling a canvas tent down anywhere and tramp all over it without doing it much damage, where a silk tent might suffer. Also, if setting the silk tent up in underbrush or, say, a spruce grove, you'd have to be moderately careful that you didn't snag the thing. But with a canvas floor, I don't think this should worry you unduly. And the additional care you might have to take would be more than repaid when you came to hauling it over a portage or portages. For you'll agree with me that there's nothing more miserable or weighty to handle on a portage than a well-soaked canvas tent.

HUNTING for a living in New Zealand.

Query:—I am a veteran, 27 years old, and particularly interested in hunting. I have heard that it is possible to make a living in New Zealand by market hunting, by selling deer hides etc. I would like to know if this is true and if an American would be permitted to engage in professional hunting.

What are the regulations concerning hunting in New Zealand? I would also like to know what the general employment situation is at the present time.

—Dean Johnson
Reno, Nevada

Reply by Tom L. Mills:—There are two outstanding means of making a living by hunting in this country—destroying the wildest of wild pigs in Taranaki, in the North Island, for which farmers offer bonuses; and culling wild and destructive deer in the South Island, for which the Government offers permits and ammunition. If you would like to get in on the latter, I suggest you write to THE SECRETARY, DEPT. OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS, WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND.

Put the question of Regulations also to that official. Tell him of your qualifications as a hunter, experience, war service; and if there are tasks you can do as a specialist, as an instructor, or other jobs congenial to you, inform him and ASK HIS ADVICE.

KIA ORA! (which means Good Luck).

CROSSBOW versus longbow.

Query:—I would like some information on crossbows, past and present. First the past, how did the crossbow compare with the plain bow as to power and accuracy? How did the crossbow compare with the early guns in accuracy and penetrating ability? I mean the type of gun and crossbow that was carried by the average foot soldier?

Now for the present, how does the modern crossbow compare with the modern bow in accuracy? Which is the best for hunting or is it just a matter of personal preference? Of course I understand that you could get off a dozen well placed shots with a bow while you were winding up a cross bow but I wondered if the longer range and greater penetrating ability of the crossbow wouldn't offset this?

If a modern high grade crossbow was fired from a machine rest what would be its spread of arrows at, say, 50, 100 and 150 yards, assuming that there isn't any wind and that the arrows were uniform? I understand that no two crossbows would shoot the same and none of the arrows would fly just the same twice running but I was trying to get a rough idea of what you could expect from a crossbow in hunting rabbits or larger game.

—C. L. Brown
Roundup, Mont.

Reply by Earl B. Powell—The military crossbow, as used in late medieval times, was more accurate than the longbow and could carry a heavier missile, but as it was so slow to operate, an archer could shoot two dozen arrows while the arbalister was winding up his weapon. Result—some of the arrows connected while the crossbowmen was getting ready, which was the worse for him.

By the time of the expedition of Cortezz into Mexico, the crossbow was lighter in pull and usually drawn by hand and had about the same range and penetration of the old "Brown Bess" musket, but the invaders found that the noise of the musket was a great asset in fighting Indians.

The accuracy of the modern crossbow in this late revival, which is as yet far from complete, is that the crossbow can be made to kill anything that the longbow will, and the range is about the same. The crossbow will shoot a straighter line but the trajectory is greater, and this can be offset a great deal by a stronger bow. I have drawn a crossbow of over 250 pounds by hand, as you only draw the thing by the use of both hands and use the BACK MUSCLES instead of the arm muscles.

For still shots when waiting in ambush, the crossbow is better for some kind of hunting, but for getting through the brush the longbow is better.

Also the crossbow makes quite a noise on release.

I don't know what a group you'd get at 50, 100 and 150 yards, for as far as I know, very little experimentation has been made with a machine rest. The sport of the crossbow is where archery was in say 1924—just beginning to rediscover the principles of the thing.

Personally I have hit a sparrow hawk on top of a telephone post at 40 yards, and he is a pretty small bird, even smaller than a robin.

SEVENTY-SIX million dollars in gold.

Query:—I was wondering if you could give me any information on the $76,000,000 treasure ship lying some 40 miles off Pensacola, Florida. Since it is only 25 feet under water why hasn't anyone recovered it? Would a metal detector work in locating the gold? What sort of an outfit would you need for such an expedition? Approximately how much would such a venture cost? Since I am an amateur at this I would appreciate any advice you could give me on sunken treasure hunting.

—Sherman Moore
Buffalo, N. Y.

Reply by Raymond Dow:—There are a great many supposed lost treasure ships off the Florida cost and I am not sure just one you mean. However regardless of which one you are seeking, the problem is the same—to locate it. Many men have spent years trying to find these wrecks. You must realize that any directions such as 40 miles off shore is very, very vague.

Yes, metal locators work in water locations, so it would be possible to locate the ships with their aid. However metal locators require considerable experience to use correctly and even more in the interpretation of the findings.

The cost of an expedition varies from very little, say when you live nearby and have the equipment on up into great sums. One expedition spent $250,000. on a Cocos Island venture and all they did was go ashore and then give up the job as hopeless. Look around for something nearer home. Also water operations are much more costly than land operations. And the odds on even locating the wrecks are very small. Many even spend years just trying to run down and check information, before making a trip. Look around for something nearer home.

CHEECHAKO and sourdough.

Query:—I would like to go to Alaska and trap or prospect. I have wanted to ever since I was discharged from the Army, but I don't want to go up there and find myself out on a limb. Could you give me the name of a trapper or miner who would hire me? So that if I went I would have someone to turn to. I am not interested in money so much as someplace to go to until I can get the lay of the land. I want someone to show me the ropes. I am 24 years old and am not afraid of work, but the kind of work I like best is outside. I am now the manager of a cafe in Salem, Oregon. I am a combat veteran with 2 years overseas and I can furnish the best of references.

—Fred M. Tedrow
Salem, Oregon

Reply by Frank Richardson Pierce:—One of the hard jobs in this Ask Adventure business is telling the brutal truth in the hope of saving fellows heartaches and expense.

Since the opening of the highway, things are tough in Alaska in the matter of jobs.

I note in your letter you have cafe experience. I think your best bet, if you can afford it, is to go to Anchorage or Fairbanks, get a job in cafe work. This will give you a chance to get a line on mining and trapping areas. Next winter the miners will be in towns and you might work out something.

I have no list of miners or trappers, and I would hesitate to suggest any given area because trapping country is often closed to give the fur a chance to build up. Often, a combination of a young man's strength and willingness to work, and an old sourdough's experience works out.

CENTRAL and South America.

Query:—I would like to know where I can obtain maps of the following places, as I am planning to make a trip there:

1. Yucatan, Mexico
2. Costa Rica
3. Panama
4. Colombia, South America

During my stay at these places I intend to do some hunting, fishing, and prospecting.

—John Laiza
Long Beach, California

Reply by Victor Shaw:—Judging by the localities for which you want maps, you could have been reading something about the reputed lost hoards of Mayan gold, which have probably gained in size told and retold through the years. Hunting them today has little chance, I believe, as many expert archeologists have spent years at it and failed, despite their historical knowledge. This search makes dramatic reading, but the chance for success is about the same as hunting our many lost mines, mostly will o' the wisps which the original discoverers couldn't re-locate themselves.

If you seriously plan to trek south into Central America, and even down into Colombia, I suggest you concentrate on the rich ores that certainly do exist in most of those countries, and which present a vastly better chance for successful discovery. Honduras, also, has some of the richest gold placer and lode deposits ever found in North America, and only in recent years has this fact started to trickle out here and there, but still unknown save to a very few mining men. And this includes myself, for I sent one man down there who was very successful beside giving me the dope in detail in numerous letters written to me right from the field, and afterward.

You've named four countries for which you want maps, and state that you're going down there to hunt, fish, and prospect. Perhaps you want maps and data on all four, so you can select one that seems the best. For it'll take you many years to investigate them all. Even Yucatan has over 80,000 square miles *not* including Quintana Roo. You travel in these countries only in the dry season—November to April inclusive—and you'll not cover any big amount of ground in 6 months in *that* type of country.

Now, I'll answer your query on maps, then add a few words more. The finest topographical maps printed are put out by the American Geographical Society, which is at Broadway at 156th St., New York City, N. Y.

Now, the hunting and fishing in all these countries is about the same, and that is the game and fish of sub-tropic regions: with monkeys, tapirs, jaguar, ocelot, alligators, some deer, turkey, etc., on the central high plateaus and plenty of venomous snakes such as rattlers, coral snakes, and my friend in Honduras wrote me the mamba, too, most venomous of all. There are many types of tropic fish most of 'em edible.

And the richest in mineral and ores is Nicaragua, with Panama in second place, and the rest trailing excepting Honduras, which I put at the top since I got details on the exceptionally rich gold area of the Olancho District, and mined little by white men. But Panama is out, for some years ago an English company leased all the best placer and lode gold ground for 99 years. Colombia has gold, silver, platinum, and emeralds, but the climate isn't too good. Nicaragua is too uncertain politically for alien prospectors, and Costa Rica too, lately.

If you want more dope on Honduras let me know. But, note that any and all these countries will require a grubstake of several thousand if you hope to make good, and I mean in U. S. *gold!*

CANOEING in the Canadian Wilderness.

Query:—I hope you can help in cleaning up some of my canoeing problems. I regret to say that most of my canoeing has been confined to the locality in which I live. The streams and creeks of this area are very small, making it difficult to go on a trip of any great length. It is not worth one's while to own his own canoe, and the canoes which can be hired cannot be taken where one wishes to go.

Back in 1947 I began to like Canada for its beautiful network of lakes where one can canoe for miles through the serenity of the North Woods. This was in Algonquin Park, Ontario. Now here are my questions.

1. Where are the best places to canoe in Canada where one can really get into the wilds?

2. Because big canoeing trips are very new to me, I would like to know just what preparations I should make for such an adventure?

3. What are the regulations for camping out and building fires to cook in the Canadian National Parks and in the Canadian wilderness areas not under the park jurisdiction?

4. Are canoes expensive to hire for such trips in Canada?

5. If I should decide to buy a canoe, what type should I consider? I would like one that does not tilt easily, that rides the water nicely, and that is very maneuverable, for either one or two men.

6. Perhaps you could advise some good literature on this subject?

7. Does the American Youth Hostel extend up in your area for canoeists?

—Clarence G. Musselman
Perkasie, Pennsylvania

Reply by H. S. M. Kemp:—You ask what type of canoe to buy. Well, as the feller says, it all depends—depends on how much junk you want to haul around with you; depends on whether you contemplate using an engine depends on how little it worries you being windbound. But if it's for a straight paddling cruise, where, if the wind blows, nobody worries about being tied up for a day or so, I'd say the sixteen-footer.

Now the sixteen-footer depends again—depends on whether you want to sit up on the seats like most white folk do, or kneel down in the thing and use the seats to sort of lean back against. This is the Indian style, and if you follow it, the sixteen-footer will carry you and a load quite safely. You can even put a sail up in it, if you're loaded fairly well. But you gotta KNEEL down in it—and for gosh sake's, don't tie boom-line! However, the sixteen-footer is quite a practical craft. Back in the days of the First War, I got a two-week pass, and, feeling homesick that far from the North, the wife and I hired one of these canoes and took a camping trip 'way up the River Thames and into the British Midlands. We went a bit too far to get back on time, but as luck would have it, a fair wind came up just as we started for home. We ran up a sail, and we had two days of the swiftest sailing that a person could ask for. Mind you, though, the canoe was well loaded, and I was used to that type. They're maneuverable, and one man can run away with them on a portage. But they have that fault—they don't stand too much of a sea.

A lovely canoe is the seventeen-foot cruiser. This gives you more length and width than the sixteen, and, for that reason is more safe. It's also easy to pack around.

The ideal utility canoe is, of course, the eighteen-foot freighter. But you would get a bit tired of paddling this all day if you had no motor. Then, too, unless you're onto

(Continued on page 126)

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the knack of it, it would take two men to handle it on the portages. Still, in this, you wouldn't need to part your hair in the middle, and if you had to hop around and haul in a big fish, you wouldn't be apt to tip the thing. But, by and large, if you're after a canoe for just a loafing, lazy holiday, get the sixteen-footer.

You can get into the "wilds" anywhere in Canada, but your closest spot would be Ontario. Look up ASK ADVENTURE'S expert, in the magazine, for that part of the country and drop him a line. [Harry M. Moore, 579 Isabella, Pembroke, Ont., Canada—Ed.]

I don't know anything of the Canadian Parks except our own Prince Albert National Park. But I suppose the regulations in force here are the same in all the National Parks of Canada: Once you're clear of the resorts, boil the kettle and camp anywhere you like—but BE CAREFUL WITH FIRE.

Canoe rental varies. Some places, a buck a day; some, five. Three dollars a day would be a fair average.

I can't give you much idea what "preparations" to make for a trip. It all depends again—depends on your love of animal comforts. My canoeing was strictly work—trading trips, and so on. The more junk we carried, the less room we had for a trading outfit. So we—the Indian and I—would carry: enough blankets to keep warm, 1 each of frypan, kettle, boiling-pot and axe. For grub: bannock, tea, sugar, a slab of bacon and a can of jam. Maybe as well, a troll and a gun. If we weren't going too far and wanted to travel in luxury, we took a can of condensed milk and a pound or so of butter. But this spartan fare might not suit you; so you'll have to arrange your own grubstake. But you should take a complete change of clothing, long underwear against the flies, the tools I've mentioned above, *and a mosquito-bar.*

Regarding literature, select the country you want to see. If it's a National Park, write Department of Mines and Resources, National Parks Branch, Ottawa. If open country, write to the Travel Bureau of whatever Provincial government is interested. (The offices of these are always located in the Provincial capitals, a list of which you can find in any atlas.)

No, I've never heard of the American Youth Hostel for canoeists. They may have something similar in Eastern Canada, but there is nothing like that around here.

Well, now; does all the foregoing help you? If not, write again. I hope when the time comes you have a nice holiday. You should do, for you can't beat a canoe trip. Moreover, if treated with respect, the canoe is the safest craft in the world. Proof? I spent half a lifetime in them and never once got dumped. And I'd better not get dumped. I can't swim!

THE END

(Continued from page 116)

lar will now buy four times as much as it will in the States.

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AND now for the announcement we mentioned above. In response to a steady demand from readers who recall many of the unforgettable classics of adventure which have appeared in this magazine, we are embarking on a new policy. Starting with the September issue, each month you will find—along with the top-flight action yarns of today—*one* outstanding story from the files of *Adventure* . . . We hesitate to employ so strong a word as masterpiece, but nothing less can adequately describe the finest work of such all-time greats in the field of fiction for men as Harold Lamb, Gordon Young, Hugh Pendexter, Talbot Mundy, Georges Surdez, W. C. Tuttle, Ernest Haycox and others of like stature. Your own suggestions will be more than welcome and will be carefully considered.

For those who remember these writers and their work, there will be, we believe, a substantial satisfaction in renewing old friendships. For those who have never made their acquaintance—well, we envy them the thrill of discovery. For next month's choice for republication, see "The Trail Ahead" on page 117—K.W.G.

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where the crew had gone. A sickness, and Dustenerry burying them at sea, one by one, until he himself was left, to die aboard ship with no living soul to slide his body over the side to the voracious sharks.

"My God," Fraynor breathed, "what happened to them?"

He found water in the galley and smelled it. It smelled fine. He wet his mouth out and then drank a little and let it settle, then drank some more. The galley looked clean. There was plenty of food.

He went forward, feeling cold. His trousers he had long since discarded as a shield for his face from the sun while he had lain in the canoe exhausted. He had left the trousers in the canoe. He walked the ship now in shorts, his tanned legs naked, no shoes or socks.

In the crew's cabin, he found nothing.

He pulled up the hatches which formed the floor, and the faint putrid stench which had tickled his nose, now became a horrible reality. He shot the beam of the flashlight down there, and he saw them, all of them, some still weakly alive, walking with strange dancing steps, the rest dead and rotting, even as Dustenerry rotted at the foot of the stairs.

A hundred rats if there was one. In the hold, atop the copra, not more than six inches from where he stood, holding the contaminated hatch in one hand.

Blindly and in repugnant horror, Fraynor dropped the hatch and stumbled up the stairs to the deck. The black death! Plague! That was why the ship had been so long overdue. The men who manned her had died, and Dustenerry was the last of them, aboard only because he could not bury himself. Bubonic plague, that was it! The *Ma'o* was bound for Paoli from Manekura, and it was at Manekura that the plague raged. Infected rats had joined the ship and the death had done its work.

Panting, breathless, in icy terror, Fraynor reached the deck and the golden sunshine, and for some unconscionable reason, his eyes were drawn slowly down to his naked legs.

Off there, to port, the outrigger canoe, clean and sterile and free of death, floated with the currents, going west.

Fraynor's legs were covered with fleas.

THE END

(Continued from page 91)

"Yes. She's kept looking—up there—many days," another put in. But no one laughed.

"Yes. Where are they?" Sievert demanded.

"Down the cliff All of them. Off to the Valhalla that Sven's men still believed in."

"And a fitting end for them. But . . . we thought . . ."

There was a long pause. Now there were tears on old men's cheeks. Younger men looked away. But Hulda's eyes were shining and unwavering.

Finally old Sievert spoke again. His voice was husky. "And you told us it might happen. You said there was no one but you between them and us. We knew there was no way to come but by this side of the mountains along the fjord." Again he stopped. Again he spoke with effort: "You told us to watch for many lights. We could always see your one light up there. We'd look up . . . and laugh at you."

Hulda looked at her father. He caught her meaning and looked down.

"No, *you* didn't laugh," he said to her. "You kept watching." Then he looked up again. All knew he had more to say. "So." He mused again, his thoughts turned inward as is the nature of men who have lived through many things. "Sven's clan is gone. All his fighters? He with the scar too?"

"Yes." Now Armand looked down. He couldn't look at old Sievert. He couldn't look at Hulda, not yet. "Yes," he said. "The leader, he with the scar, said that all of his fighting men were with him."

There was another pause as tensed swords and shields were lowered, one after another.

"Now you'll come and live in the town?" old Sievert asked. "But here!" An old imperiousness possessed him. "What are we doing out here? Come in, all. Get warm, eat! And you, Armakat! Your right hand is burned. I can guess why. Come! You are one of us."

"Yes," Armand said humbly and gratefully. "You are my friends."

But it was hard for him to speak too.

THE END

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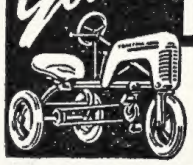

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(Continued from page 65)

had cleaned the rifle, Ennis had no inkling of Jeff's meaning.

"Well," he hedged, "what *would* be in a butt-trap? Pull-through, oil can and steel gauze, o'course."

The officer took the rifle from Jeff.

"For one thing, there's no steel gauze," Jeff said, as the lieutenant emptied the butt-trap.

"No," the officer agreed, "the gauze is missing." He looked curiously at Ennis.

"I'd forgotten," Ennis said easily. "Those gauzes are always getting lost, as I'm sure you know, sir. Private Mace made a good guess—that's all."

"It's a coincidence, but it's not conclusive," the other agreed. "Those gauzes *do* get lost—they're used so seldom."

Jeff had still to lead his ace. "Ask the corporal, sir, if there's anything odd about the pull-through."

"What *would* be odd about it?" Ennis blustered.

By now the lieutenant was clearly out of patience. "I've got to be moving on, you two. No more of this now."

"Ask him about the cleaning flannel," Jeff said desperately. Was he too late with his point, after all?

The lieutenant was plainly intrigued, in spite of himself.

"The flannel, you say?"

"Just ask him, please, sir."

"Issue flannel, for the purpose," Ennis said. "A little square."

"Only this piece is a kind of triangle," Jeff said.

The officer drew the blackened, oily bit of cloth from the pull-through loop. It was triangular.

"And here's where it come from," Jeff went on. He yanked his shirttail up above his shorts and exhibited the torn spot. "It fits there," he concluded.

Which of course it had to, thread for thread.

"This certainly changes everything," the lieutenant said thoughtfully. Then he permitted himself a faint smile before he straightened. "No time for more of this now. But I don't think you need worry, Mace. What a court martial will do to this gentleman is going to be—as our American cousins say—just too bad!"

THE END

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